something wicked this way comes

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by antiheroblake

Summary

will graham has always been able to see the dead, maybe he didn't know it, maybe he didn't want to know it, but he passed it as an empathy disorder. that felt safer, and after years of lying, he believed it himself. that is until hannibal lecter's second coming. wrong and determined, just like the messiah he learned to love from both boyhood and adulthood, the ghost of his lost love pushes him to not turn his back on the becoming they so diligently worked on – and to become more than it.

Notes

playlist!

Chapter 1

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. 2 SAMUEL 1, VERSES 11-12

The salt of the ocean is so familiar to him, that when he opens his mouth to breathe, he doesn't even realize that he's taking in water. It feels like he's taken a breath by the seaside when he was 16 and his father had him working on boats after school–or instead of going to school at all. It's almost a comfort.

He's still gripping Hannibal's shirt so tightly that his knuckles ache, near melting into the fabric with the desire to just hold on. To keep them together even now, and in his shocked mind, they are young, chin deep in the wild oceans of the South, and the water is cold but the day is hot and the air vaguely smells of seaweed and driftwood.

He can hear kids yelling; the sounds of a dog. Someone is playing football, kicking up sand and broken shells. In his peripheral vision a man is fishing, his pole shoved into the sand while he lazes about in a beach chair.

Around his neck is a chain with a cross on it. Something his father gave him, *to keep that shit out of your head*, he had said. It's heavy, and Jesus is crucified on it, a crown of thorns pressed into the soft flesh of his skull.

He's only looking at Hannibal, his maroon eyes shine with the reflection of the water and it catches the air in Will's throat oddly. Will's hair is longer, clinging to the back of his neck and around his face. Hannibal is smiling, and a young girl calls for them from the shore.

He touches the chain on his neck, and when he makes contact with the cool metal, his fingers burn like brimstone and it breaks and slips beneath the dark Southern waves.

When his lungs begin to burn from the mix of ocean water and lack of oxygen he sputters, and he comes back to the exact moment that they're in. His vision is blurred, flecks of void that he isn't sure is from the depth or the bloodloss infect his eyes. Pressure is building in his skull and Hannibal is still held tightly against him.

The salt water stings where he's been cut open, it's not as painful as the cold slice of a blade, but it's a near thing. His entire body aches like a bruise pressed by careless hands, but he does not let go of Hannibal's shirt. Makes a point that he cannot let go.

He pulls them up, it's a fight. His arms are weak and Hannibal is heavy, but after fighting the current and the pounding in his head that makes him nauseous, they break the surface of the water. It feels like revival–this is how he imagines Christian's must feel when they come out of the water after baptism. This is what Jesus must have felt on the third day.

He tucks his arm around Hannibal's chest and moves forward in the water. His legs hurt worse than they did when they were below, and he has to regrip Hannibal to make sure they stay together, but he's determined. A wave crashes, sending them back under with a spiraling motion, and he has to hold on tight to ensure they stay together.

It's a lot of this, going under and coming back up and barely holding on. Panic sears the edges of his mind each time they're shoved under and he has to fight their back up. He's taking deep, unsettled breaths as he fights through the power of the ocean.

Even as a child he knew that a fight between man and sea could only end badly. There were enough drownings and murders and hurricanes to show him that the sea always won in the end. One man against the powerful hand of an unforgiving god was nothing.

They can't be more than a few hundred feet from the shore, but it feels like miles. He just can't get there fast enough.

His shoulder's starting to get in a bad way too. It's always been fucked up, but he's taken too many hits to it now; he isn't as young as he used to be. It tingles, shoots up straight through the back, and makes his fingers clench up and he swears he can feel the tendons in his arms moving.

His vision blurs at the pain, but he needs to get them to shore. It's a mantra at this point, just a little more, just a little more, just a little more–

"We're almost there." Will says as water sprays into his mouth, and it tastes like home. "We're gonna be okay."

Just a few more feet, and then he can touch the ocean floor and it might be the best thing he's ever felt in his entire life. He almost cries when he feels the suck of sand against his ruined shoes, the crunch of shells under him.

He half crawls up the beach, the ocean pushing them forward instead of drawing them back. Not that it would have a chance; Will is not letting go. He won't, he refuses. God himself will have to rip Hannibal from him.

One of his hands is cut open on shells.

"Holy hell," he says, voice strangled but near laughing when he finally drops them both bodily against the ground, "that was horrific."

He moves, body slower than his mind, and grabs Hannibal by the collar of his shirt so he can pull him up out of the shallow spot where the waves meet the shore. He's still laughing, he hasn't even looked at Hannibal yet. His mind is too wild with pain and blood loss to have even noticed him beyond the feel of his body beneath his hands, he rolls and laughs at sand sticks to his shirt and hair and skin. It gets under his nails and in his shoes but he's still laughing.

"Dr. Lecter," he says, tears in his eyes from it all, "we gotta go."

Will pushes himself up, and pain stings from his cheek down his neck and meets the pain in his vertebrates. He huffs a sigh, grabbing at the open flesh, and feeling the horrible way sand gets into it.

He sits a few more seconds, trying to regain himself from the pain, to let his mind catch up, and for what can't be more than three seconds, he thinks he's going to pass out.

When he comes back to himself and the pain has momentarily subsided, he hears the soft cush of the ocean, the way he laps up the sand. There is sand under his nails; he doesn't like it. His face stings, his shoulder burns, and now he can feel a sharp pang in his right leg that definitely didn't come from the Dragon.

Worst of all, there has been no movement beside him.

"Hannibal?" His voice is rough when it comes out and he's not even sure he says his name around it, but he repeats it again for good measure, no less destroyed than the first.

His head moves and it takes a little time for his eyes to catch up but Hannibal is laying on the beach, his hair stuck to his forehead, hands on either side of him, unmoving. Not even the stutter of a breath.

High tide is coming in, the ocean is starting to catch up with the both of them. Water comes up around Hannibal's feet and then back down. It's a ridiculous thought, but Will thinks the ocean is trying to steal him. That he is going to turn into sand and be lost to Will forever. Somehow, god is punishing him.

"Oh god, oh fuck." Will moves, and bites his lip so hard when the pain flares again that his blood drips down onto Hannibal's face. "No–no."

He presses clasped hands against his chest. He knows how to do this, he's done it before. All it takes is a rhythm, and Hannibal will surely be coughing up water. He'll call him something ridiculous, a menace, something, and everything will be okay.

30 seconds pass and his body hurts so bad that he can't keep the beats steady. His abdomen starts to clench up, and he doesn't know if he's over doing it, if he has internal bleeding, or if he's going to be sick.

He will be sick if Hannibal doesn't wake up soon.

"Come on, come on." He thinks he's crying, but he's desperate and hardly breathing. "It's okay, Hannibal. You've got to wake up."

He feels Hannibal's ribs crack from the pressure and that's good, he knows that's good. "Please," he watches his face, looking for any signs of life there. He's pale and his bullet wound isn't bleeding anymore and he hasn't stirred once. "I'm sorry, please."

His knuckles ache, his arms are so heavy but he keeps going. He doesn't want to give up, he can't. They've made it this far. Will ripped them out of the womb of the ocean, he can revive Hannibal.

His hair is in his eyes, sand falling from it, and he can taste the copper bloom of his lip, it's staining his teeth. He feels wild, unhinged. Like he may crawl out of his skin and be muscle and tendon and ligament.

"I'm so sorry," voice cracking, he leans forward slightly to try and watch for something, anything, "just wake up. Wake up, I'll make it better, I promise. I'll go anywhere you want to, be anyone you want me to be. You just have to–"

His arms catch himself before he can fall forward. There is this edged blackness at the corners of his eyes. It's bleeding into everything. He's losing it and Hannibal hasn't woken up.

Is he Judas?

"Hannibal." His throat seizes, tears mixing with the blood pouring from his lip. He keeps biting it, ripping it more and more open. "Please, don't do this. I'm sorry."

He must perform cpr for upwards of 20 minutes before his body fails him. There are words on his lips, but his mind can't exactly make out what they are. Praying, he thinks, but is praying just begging? Isn't it just asking to be heard?

When the pain subsides again, he pushes himself up so he can look at his creation. Hannibal is turning blue, and whether it's because Will's mind is loosely tethered to reality or because they fell fifty feet, his face doesn't look right. Will can't place it, but he knows.

He touches his face, regardless, because he needs to. His skin is cold under his fingertips and he wants to lay across him; warm him up and keep him that way. His thumb brushes the scar on his cheek, the round curve of his nose, the soft skin under his eyes.

He's praying again, he thinks. A night time prayer, the kind kids say. Hannibal wouldn't like it, because in some strange, offhanded way, he's begging a god he doesn't believe in to please keep Hannibal's soul safe for Will. Hold it, warm it.

It takes an unnecessary amount of movement, but he leans over Hannibal, trembling hands on his face, and kisses him.

If he was in his right mind, he doesn't think he would have done this, or at least, he tries to reassure himself of that, but he kisses Hannibal and his lips are cold and turning blue. He kisses him, it's tender, the way he should have kissed him in the kitchen, in Italy, on the cliff. It makes his own lips taste like ocean and skin and death and he imagines it would always have tasted like this.

His blood settles onto Hannibal's lips, and that's good. The ocean washed away so much of Dolarhyde's blood from Hannibal's face and now Will has replaced it with his own. It should be this way; Will's blood should be what stains Hannibal. Nothing else. He belongs to Will, no one else.

He lays back down in the sand. The sky is clear and the stars shine, and he wonders if god is looking down at them. If he is laughing at them.

He takes Hannibal's hand.

They're sitting on the beach, and the sun is getting low, breaking into purples and oranges and saturating the sea. A soft breeze works its way through his salt drying hairs.

It's a good day, Will thinks. It smells like ice cream and Hannibal's expensive cologne, and someone distantly, a grill.

Their beach towels are oddly floral, something a girl would have picked out, but Will doesn't say anything about it. The chain on his neck hangs heavily again, and Hannibal is beside him. Their shoulders brush occasionally.

When the deep blue of the sky comes out, replacing the sun and making way for the moon, Hannibal takes Will's hand in his, rubbing his thumb against his knuckles. He speaks to him in Italian, soft words that Will only understands in a cosmic way, but he thinks it's about love.

Behind them, a woman calls them in for dinner.

His body is being moved. He doesn't know where, but he can hear someone talking. Someone he knows–a man–Jack. He's talking about a hospital and calling Mrs. Graham, telling them to hurry up, and someone else is talking about two bodies.

He blinks. There's a mask on his face, an oxygen supply, and he's still covered in sand but he isn't by the ocean now. His hand is empty, he can't feel Hannibal beside him. He tries to move his head to see what's happening, but it's dark outside and what he does see is paramedics.

Hannibal isn't at his side.

No. No. He tries to say that, tries to tell them to take him back to the beach. He needs – he has to be with Hannibal. This isn't right.

Someone is going to touch Hannibal's body. They're going to categorize things and put things into evidence bags and they aren't going to treat him right. They were supposed to die in the ocean, he should have let them die together.

They're moving him to an ambulance and there are two bodies and he isn't one of them. He's going–

Will jerks upward, trying to pull the mask off of his face. He almost regrets it because of how it makes him feel. The pain is worse than it was, and he flails, almost throwing himself from the gurney.

There are hands on his shoulder pushing him back down, which isn't good for any of them because Will fights more. Of course, he does.

“You’re okay, Mr. Graham. You’re safe now.”

Will digs his nails into someone’s arm. They try to snatch back, and it causes his nails to run bloodied lines across their arm. It feels good, he wants to do it again.

“Will!” He hears Jack say, hears his footsteps as he comes up to where he is. “You’re fine, Will. They’re taking you to the hospital, Molly will be waiting.”

There is blood under his nails, and it isn’t Hannibal’s, and they don’t even get him to the ambulance before someone walks away and comes back with a needle and jabs it into his thigh. Whatever goes in him burns, but nothing hurts like his hands and his chest.

He calms–or he gets drowsy. It’s one of the two, but either way, it feels good. It feels like letting go.

He tries for the mask again, fumbling fingers and desperate movements. Jack stops the paramedics and moves the mask for him.

Will swallows. “Where is he?”

Jack gives him a look, a mix of worry and tenderness? Will is too far gone to pick it apart for all it’s worth. “He’s dead, Will.”

Something must happen across his face. He doesn’t know what it could be, but it has to be something because Jack’s lips thin and he looks out towards the cliff. He looks tired, older than Will remembers.

“Price and Zeller are looking at him right now. We aren’t letting anyone else near him.”

Whatever they gave him was good. His shoulder isn’t tingling, and he forgets his cheek is slit in two. The ache in his chest that is more than just the creaking of his ribs starts to feel far away.

Jack’s words soothe him in a terrible way. He trusts Price and Zeller; they’re good people. They’ll take adequate care of him.

They shouldn’t have to. Will should have let them rot at the bottom of the ocean. He should have let the fish eat them and let their skeletons stay together. Become sediment.

He can smell the ocean as his vision swims, tastes Hannibal’s death on his lips, and when he closes his eyes again, finally, they’re walking up a shady beach trail.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His right hand stings or tingles. He's not exactly sure which it is in his hazy state, but whatever it does, he decides to just think of it as buzzing. Right across his palm and in between his fingers and then in bone and blood until his heart is pumping the feeling through his entire system. Demanding it be felt like a blanket, until it buries itself all the way into his core and then up, up, up.

Deep in him, vines of this sensation wrap up into his ribs, around his clavicle, and to the top vertebrae. Just like kudzu, it keeps going until it's touching his gray matter. Each lobe of his brain buzzes and squeezes until he thinks he can hear it in his muffled ears–or a beeping noise.

The feeling is almost familiar like the bitter aftertaste of a memory that he's buried somewhere he should never go. Vaguely he can hear the deep Southern drawl of a preacher. The booming of a prayer that is spoken in half-assed Latin and Tongues. The melancholic groaning of a piano. Fingers against his skin like black ice as people he can't place sing so loud he feels it in his bones.

He flexes his fingers, the buzzing moves up his wrist, in four lines, and the prayer, as quickly as it rattled through his mind, fades into something from a forgotten nightmare. Down, down, down, into the cemetery of his memories, buried under ashes and dust.

Now he tries to focus on the feeling. Not how it's rooted itself into him, but how it feels almost distinct in its creeping movement up to the soft spot of the inside of his elbow. Something about it is nostalgic, like a baby blanket.

Maybe it's a prickling feeling? All he knows is the more he focuses on it, the more he leaves the black room he was in and emerges in the depths of the ocean. Cold water engulfs the dark room around him until he's weightless.

He doesn't panic, there's no need for that. This is what he wanted, after all.

Everything slows down around him, the flex of his fingers, the beeping, turning more gargled as the seconds tick by, like he's sinking farther into the sea, soon he'll hit the ocean floor. Soft sand is pluming around him, and eventually, the fish will slowly eat away at his body. Either devouring him completely, or he'll bloat and float back to the surface to be picked apart by sea birds.

That would be good, either way, so long as his bones were lost at the bottom, in the sand, as long as they're mixed with Hannibal's.

His fingers flex, for water, for sand, for Hannibal. When he opens his hand, water does not move around him, there is no body to cling to. His hands are empty.

His eyes snap open, everything is too bright and too loud to be the bottom of the ocean or even the cliff house. His head jerks, entire body quivering with pain that shoots up his spine and into the base of his skull. There's the wild beeping of monitors, and the distinct chitter of overhead lights, they both ring in his ears like ocean waves, sucking him back down with each pass over his raw senses.

What sends him into more of a panic are the hands on his body. People are holding him down. Two at his legs, one pressing sharply on his shoulders until the stab wound in his shoulder burns like ice.

Three people in total then–maybe, he can't tell. Three holding him down, maybe more in the room to watch him struggle. The buzzing in his hand and wrist is gone, and distantly, he misses it. Or he would if he wasn't pushing someone off of him like a feral animal. Nails dig into the soft flesh of a face he has yet to make out until he feels the squelch of skin lodging itself under his nails.

"Mr. Graham, please calm down." A shrill voice half-screams, but he can't see a mouth moving, and the telltale sharpness of a restraint attempting to be fastened has him kicking out of the hold they have on him and letting his bare feet hit the hospital's freezing floor.

He snatches his body away from the people in the room, causing whoever he was clawing at to skitter back, shoes squeaking horribly against the tiled floors. His heart is beating wildly, pumping blood so hard he can hear the rush through his ears. In front of him stand a doctor and two nurses, that's what they look like. They show their hands as a sign of peace. Will looks between them like a feral dog, perfect crescents line the cheeks of the young doctor, and the two nurses seem a bit dazed by his reaction but nothing more.

"Where is he?" He wants to scream, but it comes out sour. His throat is parched, and his tongue is heavy from disuse. Every word passes like thorns over the gentle flesh of his tongue. "Where is Hannibal Lecter?"

"Mr. Graham, calm down or we will have to sedate you, everything's okay." One of the nurses tries, this one he recognizes as being the eldest in the room. Maybe even older than himself. "Just take a deep breath. I'm sure all of this is very frightening for you."

"Where–?" He's feeling behind himself for something, anything to use against them. A million thoughts travel through his mind as he tries to think about what events led up to this. (He shouldn't be in a hospital, that doesn't add up to what he last remembers. Unless he's been arrested but if he was arrested then where is Hannibal?) The counter is empty from what he can tell, but he's not willing to turn his back on these people. "Where the fuck am I?"

"You're at the hospital, you're safe." The doctor is trying to be detached, clinical, but he comes off as desperate. Holding his face where Will had attacked him. "No one here is going to hurt you."

Will tries to regain his bearings immediately. He doesn't remember getting to a hospital, he doesn't even remember an ambulance ride. What he does remember is the ocean. Assaulting waves trying and failing to rip Hannibal from his determined grip as he dragged their cold

bodies up onto the little beach below the cliff. He remembers laughing at the absurdity of it all. Lying in the sand, feeling it cling to his skin and wounds.

He remembers the taste of death on his lips.

His throat tightens, the room drops in temperature like an arctic burst, and he feels like he may be choking on water and salt and sand. Whether he stumbles or his legs give out, he's not sure, but he finds himself leaning against the counter he was just searching for a weapon. Hands gripping the countertop so hard his knuckles creak and he fears he's going to break it. What he doesn't expect to do is gag, tears burning in his eyes as he dry heaves. He needs something–fucking grief counseling–or any brand of whiskey he can get his hands on.

"When did I–"

"Please, get back into bed. We'll get your wife and she can talk to you." The nurse that's been talking tells him and makes a gentle, if not trembling, gesture towards the hospital bed. "It will only take a moment, Mr. Graham."

He's hesitant. The idea of getting in the bed feels like admitting that this is his reality. That this is real and not some horrific dream his sinful mind created from depleting oxygen in his system. He thinks he does crack the countertop then, or he holds it so tight he breaks a bone in a hand. He isn't sure which it is, but his stomach twists up again, forcing another dry heaving spell and tears break the barrier, warm down cool skin, fingernails on velvet.

In the end, two and a half minutes after the nurse suggested it, he clambers back into the bed. His entire body is still sore, his hands are shaking, and he feels like he needs to vomit, and standing isn't helping any of that. He needs a familiar face right now, too, something to ground him a little. To remind him that he's okay.

One of the nurses, the older one with a round face and a badge that reads Julia, stays in the room with him. Just watching him, observing his every move like he might jump into action once again. Will does the same to her out of the corner of his eye, but he has no desire to move again. He has no desire to do anything at all.

If he could sink into the horrible depths of this thin mattress, he would. Disappear for good. That was the plan. That was supposed to be what happened, whether it was in life or death.

It's no more than 45 seconds pass before the door is opening and Molly is drawn to his bed like a moth to a light, only the echo of a limp with each step towards him.

She's healed well. Better than he expected in all honesty. Dolarhyde was a vicious creature, they both know that firsthand. He could have done worse to her if Molly wasn't such a fighter.

The nurse takes that as her cue and disappears out of the room, the door clicking shut behind her. For a moment, Will almost feels like calling out for her to stay. To tell Molly to leave because if there isn't a familiar face then maybe this isn't his reality after all. Maybe he was dead wrong for wanting her to come in here at all. Somehow, this is worse.

“Oh god, Will.” She takes his hand before he can say anything to her at all, fingers interlocking between his, and squeezes as if to reassure him. “I was so worried about you. When I got the call… they made it out like you had died.”

Will stares up at Molly, blinking stupidly. An uncomfortable warmth settles in his stomach. “Where’s Jack?”

She bristles, momentarily taken aback by his less-than-enthusiastic response to her entry. Still, she collects herself before responding. “He’s on the way, probably within the hour.”

Will nods to himself more than to her. He needs to collect his thoughts before he gets here. He hadn’t planned on living exactly, and once he pulled them both from the ocean he wanted to run, to get as far from this hellhole as he could. Now he needs to start scripting something, he needs to make sure it sounds real, biblical in the way both Dolarhyde and Hannibal would have it.

He doesn’t want the fbi on his ass anymore, not about this, not about anything. They’re going to pick him apart for any discrepancies in his story and there’s only so much fear and blood loss they’ll accept when it comes to plot holes. Especially Purnell.

“He wants–“

Molly’s mouth screws up, the kind of look she gives him when he’s fucked up in some weird way. “I don’t like this, Will. He’s been here every day asking how you are. If you’re up. He wants to know what happened.”

Will leans back into the bed finally, trying to relax and not dry heave again. “Jack cares, in his own way.”

“He asked you to go out there again, I know I told you it was fine, but really Will. He must have known this was bound to happen.” Molly squeezes his hand again and only then does Will wrap his fingers into the warm, familiar embrace of her. “I mean, he knows everything that happened. How he tried to kill you, and he just…”

Will tongues at the seam of his cheek. It’s healed nicely, he must have had stitches at some point that they took out. Then, he touches his cheek with his hand. It’s got a bandage on it, he didn’t even realize it, but the stitches are out.

He does his best to smile at her, but he feels an incomprehensible void, a hand stuck straight into his chest and ripped out his crystallizing heart. Not only that, but it pulls on his scarring cheek. “How long was I out?”

Molly looks up like she’s trying not to cry. “You’ve been in a medically induced coma for almost a month. They were worried you were going to get septic.”

“A month?” He repeats to confirm to himself.

He doesn’t know why, logically it makes no sense, but for some inconceivable reason he thought three days. It doesn’t add up, given how healed they both are, and how stiff his

muscles feel, but his mind insisted it was only three days.

She shrugs half-heartedly, the rigid line of her body shaking like a leaf in the wind. “You kept fighting them, talking gibberish about being thrown from something? Cast out of something? Somewhere? I think that’s the phrasing you used, and your blood pressure was so high so they induced you.”

Will closes his eyes and then nods towards a chair, rubbing his thumb across her knuckles. “Are you going to sit?”

The first thing Will notices are the bags under Jack’s eyes. He wonders how long it’s been since he had a full night’s sleep, and if he’s still good at guessing he’d say probably around a month.

Jack moves to sit, hand on the back of the chair Molly was in until a nurse called up and said he had arrived and requested to speak to Will alone. “You got rid of them both.”

“Did y’all–“ Will immediately corrects himself, “did the FBI bury him?”

Jack freezes before he sits all the way down. The disapproving look he gives him is nothing short of annoyed. “Will.”

“Did you?” He says, pitch lower than he meant for it to be. His tone is determined, but his throat still scratches with every attempt to sound anything more than pitiful. “This is important to me, Jack.”

Something flashes behind Jack’s eyes, less anger, and more commiseration. “He was cremated. No one was found to claim the body and the government did not want to pay to have him buried.”

Burned to dust and ash, a city on fire for sin.

Will rubs his tongue across his teeth. He’d been allowed to brush his teeth with a toothbrush given by the hospital. It was small and the bristles hurt, and the nurse Julia had to watch to make sure he didn’t open his mouth too wide and reopen the wound on his cheek.

He swallows around thickness in his throat. He doesn’t want to cry again, and he knows it’s partly a mixture of the painkillers in his system and having been practically dead to the world for a month, but he also feels like he woke up and found out his right hand was chopped off. It was gangrene and rotting but it was his.

“What did you do with his ashes?” He cracks his knuckles awkwardly, looking just above Jack’s head.

“They’re currently sitting in–“

“I want them.” He cuts him off almost immediately, speaking before he even thinks about what words come tumbling out of his mouth. It isn’t a lie though, he would have taken his

body and buried it. He should have his ashes.

Jack sighs exasperatedly, but not shocked. “Will, we’re looking for family to take them.”

Will’s upper lip twitches; he catches himself before he bears his teeth. “I *am* his family.”

“Think about Molly.” Jack tries, but the way the corners of his eyes crinkle gives away that he knows this is already a battle lost. “About the boy, too. Do you think this would be good for them? Do you think it’ll be good for you?”

“I’ll keep them in the box,” Will argues, his voice is getting a bit more stern and less like a baby bird's squawk. “I’ll never open it, I just–his ashes can’t hurt anyone. They’re just ashes.”

Jack sits then, hands folded, elbows on his thighs as he leans forward. “The emotional toll. Besides, The Bureau isn’t going to give them to you. You know how they’ve always felt about you, especially after everything that happened with Lecter.”

“They *owe* me. After everything I did for them, I gave so much of myself and I lost just about everything. I got rid of two serial killers none of you could handle. I’ve caught more than some people catch in their entire careers.” Will breathes in an attempt to keep himself calm. “I want his ashes, Jack, and they want them out of their hands.”

Leaning back in the chair like it’s a chore, he sucks his teeth. “If you give me your statement and it gets checked off, I’ll see what I can do.”

Will isn’t soothed by that, but he takes Jack’s word for it because it’s all he has at the moment. “Don’t tell Molly about it.”

He looks at him, and then out the glass window where Molly paces back and forth, rage radiating off her in waves. It doesn’t take an empathy disorder to feel it. Worst of all, if looks could kill, Jack would be dead three times over. “That’s your hill, Will. Believe me, that isn’t the kind of news I want to break to her.”

Will rolls his shoulders, and the stab wound burns dully. The doctor, not the one he sunk his nails into, but an older one, told him that he’s probably going to have nerve issues in that shoulder for the rest of his life. Especially at his age, repeated damage is pretty much a nerve death sentence so either expect no feeling and an almost near constant burning until the day he dies.

He doesn’t hiss, and the feeling there is different than the feeling he felt earlier so whatever that was, it wasn’t nerve damage. Maybe it was Molly, but even then, that doesn’t exactly feel like the correct answer.

Will sits up to go over the details of what happened with Jack. He embellishes what needs to be, leaving out other details that would make it all a little too ecclesiastical by nature. Not that he isn’t sure Jack has put together his own ideas about what happened and does not care for the truth.

The truth, Jack knows what it is, or at least a rough estimation. Will's sure based on the noncommittal *mhm's* and *go on's* he says every few minutes. He knows the truth enough, he feels better in the dark.

As far as the fbi will ever be concerned, Hannibal forced Will to come with him, threatening the life of his wife and child, and then told him if he wanted to live, he'd have to help kill Francis Dolarhyde. He planned on abducting Will, which was made obvious by passports they found in the cliff house with fake names for him and Will, and the deed to a house in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. However, in a last-ditch effort to stop all the killing and save his family, Will pushed them both over the edge of the cliff.

It's a solid story and with no other witnesses to fact-check, it's the best they've got.

"You'll talk to them for me," Will says as Jack stands to leave. "Tell them what I want."

Jack pauses, hand hesitating to reach out and shake Will's. "I don't understand the relationship the two of you had, I'm not sure whether you hated him or loved him, but I'd like the ashes gone and they don't want to give him a grave in case cult fans make it a memorial. So, I'll talk to Purnell about it." Jack almost smiles. "If she comes around to cross-examine you, you better kiss ass, or you won't get them and Purnell is liable to tell Molly you asked for them in the first place."

Will gives him a short nod before he goes to the door. A part of him thinks that this may be one of the last, if not the very last times he sees Jack Crawford. He's happier for it, they both are.

Jack hesitates for a moment there. "You should lay low. We don't want you on the news for anything more than what the FBI statements that have been made."

He looks at him, clearing his throat oddly. "Okay?"

"The kind of thing you did," Jack looks at him sternly. It doesn't have an affect on Will. "People want their 15 minutes of fame too."

Will nods once, only because it'll make Jack leave and he's rubbed raw from this conversation.

When Molly slips through the door she visibly shivers and wraps her jacket around herself. Jack had kept his coat on as well as if the room's been cold. "He was here for a long time."

Will tries his best to sound like a person not in mourning, like going over the details of what happened up until the point he threw them both off a cliff to die together hadn't gutted him and left him to bleed on the altar of love. Like he didn't have to stop talking twice because he could feel the sea in his throat and eyes.

"Well, I'm the only living witness." He lays back flat against the bed, the hospital pillowcase itches his neck but he doesn't make a move to adjust or scratch it. He lets it irritate, and sinks a little more into himself.

She breathes in deeply and then lets it go like she's trying to empty herself of everything negative. "It's probably better that way. It was only a matter of time before he tried to escape on his own."

Will stares at the smooth white ceiling, listening as Molly sits again. "Of course, the world's a better place."

Molly looks at him and tries to read his face but Will is blank. His eyes are off in the middle distance, face flat or expression and color. "The good news is, they say you can go home within the next two days."

His tongue juts out, the tip pressing against his bottom lip, hoping foolishly that he may still taste Hannibal's cold lips. "Home."

"I know you must feel really weird right now." Molly tries, she's not exactly completely well herself and if Will wasn't trying to stay neutral to the entire situation, maybe he'd notice. "Being back will do you some good. Wally misses you."

There's a tingling on his left thigh. Just a few inches above his knee, but he doesn't acknowledge it, doesn't want to call it to anyone's attention. "Weird doesn't begin to explain how I feel."

Chapter End Notes

i updated so i can reward myself with cake goodbye

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> there is heterosexual sex in this chapter but like in a really depressing way bc will is will and molly deserves better

There is something to be said about a man who is grieving a loss he can never mention to another soul. If each atom in him splits, will anyone hear the nuclear explosion of his heart and mind, or will he remain a stagnant, never changing thing in the eyes of all who knew him before that moment?

It feels like he's staring directly into the eyes of the fourth Horsemen of the Apocalypse. He's met them all over the past five years. Conquest, when Hannibal framed him for murder, War when he came to him ready to trap him, Famine in those three years they were separated, and now–now he's met Death.

It leaves him desolate, having six crows feast on his flesh and bones. He doesn't shower for a week and only manages to brush his teeth because the feeling is too much for him to handle.

Molly, the good and kind woman that she is, gives him a wide berth when he comes home that week. She cooks, cleans, and doesn't demand anything from him. When he sleeps on the couch the first three nights because he keeps dreaming of a man dressed in scarlet and purple, adorned with gold, jewels, and pearls standing at the end of their bed every night, she doesn't get angry.

No, she is understanding and soft, like any good wife would be. Will is a hero–a hero with an array of issues that didn't start with Hannibal but definitely end with him. She knows this, in the way in which she decided she should. Filling in the blanks Will didn't offer up with her own research on PTSD and Major Depressive Episodes and the monster that was Hannibal Lecter.

He should be happy with this, this kindness she's given him. He's not, though. He's more convinced he's having another episode of Encephalitis, or maybe he's finally devolved into a Paranoid Personality Disorder. Next, he'll think someone's out to get him - even if he killed both the people who would ever come after him.

Wally avoids the house like the plague. Whether it's a new occurrence since Will's come home or because of what happened here, he doesn't know. Nor does he ask, not sure which answer he prefers. Which will make his skin crawl worse and the paranoia rip him open just a little more. It's better, anyway, Wally doesn't need to see him rot. He's been through enough.

He lays in bed after the fourth day, for a very long time. Mostly because he's still injured from the fall, but partly because when he closes his eyes and he's alone, he can imagine Hannibal is laying beside him. Just on the other side of the bed, just out of reach.

It's almost cruel, how much more this fantasy comforts him than the warm body of his wife next to him.

It's halfway to three months before he ventures out anywhere past the living room, and even then he debates laying in the bed. He feels like he's being followed, looking over his shoulder three times in the span of 45 seconds, but there's never anything there.

Molly thinks it's because of Hannibal and the Dragon. Of course, he's paranoid. They all are, to some degree, and he had to stare down two serial killers, one of which tried to gut him and eat him. It all makes complete sense, and she tells him so.

Will doesn't agree, but he doesn't tell her that. Even after Hannibal gutted him, after he took a bone saw to him, he was never scared of the man. There was no need to look over his shoulder in panic. As for Francis, he walked into the lion's den, believing himself Daniel, and died. They killed him, a bloodied sacrifice on the altar of their love. No, that isn't why he keeps looking.

He isn't sure why, exactly, he looks. He just knows it doesn't have to do with the threat of an untimely death. It's more like a memory of a dream. Something nostalgic, like a song he can only remember the beat to.

The only good thing to come out of this is the fact that the fbi has compensated his family beautifully. They said it's for the injuries Will sustained while in their hands, but it's silence money. Only so much information is ever allowed to get out to the public, and this would be too much. As far as anyone's concerned, Will Graham was a victim who ended Hannibal Lecter's reign of terror. That's how everyone would like to keep it.

He'll be mythical, he's sure. Like a page out of a Bible with a broken spine. The trainees will fall into line to hear how Will Graham took down one of the most notorious serial killers of all time. How he single-handedly outsmarted the Tooth Fairy and the Chesapeake Ripper.

They won't know the truth, and it's better that way. No one needs to know.

Will sits on the couch, the tv plays but he isn't really watching whatever's on the screen. His shoulder burns, but he writes it off as the change in weather. It has to be the change in the weather.

"You'll feel better," Molly reassures that night at dinner. She makes gumbo, and Will doesn't fault her for the fact she puts the wrong sausage in it. Probably couldn't find andouille and just went with whatever the internet said was a good substitute–italian sausage in this case. He does, however, and with a good amount of guilt, think that Hannibal wouldn't have made the meal without the proper ingredients. "Soon this'll all be a sick dream."

Will nods, but he doesn't agree. And how could he tell her? Any sort of disagreement would be seen as denial and she'd continue her findings on PTSD.

Instead, he separates the italian sausage from the rest of his meal and eats. “I hope so.”

Molly takes a spoonful of her dinner, pleased with her creation and looking for approval from Will he’s not able to give at this moment. “You survived something horrific. It’s going to take time.”

He knew he’d come back different. He didn’t intend to. He didn’t intend to come back at all. He accepted his fate, he hoped they would die together or live together. Not that they’d be separated. They can’t survive separation, he knows that now. Three years and he was tearing at his seams and pretending all was well. He doesn’t know how he’s going to handle the rest of his life.

At least before Hannibal was alive. He was alive and Will knew where he was and could have, feasibly, gone to see him whenever he wanted. He had that option. Now, he’s hoping that the fbi will mail him his remains. He wonders if that’ll be good enough.

“It was somethin’,” Will says with a sigh.

Molly’s face twists and she grinds her teeth. “You don’t have to downplay it. It was horrific. Jack told me how bad the scene was.”

Will adjusts in his chair, folding in on himself slightly.

The drive to the house wasn’t horrific. Being with Hannibal wasn’t horrific. Killing Francis wasn’t horrific. The ocean was horrific. The heaviness of Hannibal’s body was horrific. The feeling of his cold lips against Will’s was horrific. Waking up in a hospital without him was horrific.

She doesn’t know what she’s talking about.

Will’s lip twitches. “How’s Wally?”

She rolls her shoulders, nodding as she speaks. “The house scares him. He’s with my parents this week. He’s taking his time, you need to, too.”

“That’s understandable.” Will takes another bite before standing to get the tabasco from the fridge. He grabs a beer, while he’s at it and cracks it open before he can stop himself. “I’d be scared too if I was him.”

“It’s okay if you’re scared.” Molly gives him a strange look as he sits back down. It’s not one he sees often but it tells him that she’s worried about him, in some way. “I know this has been really hard for you. You never wanted to go back and I told you it was okay, and I know you felt obligated to do it.”

Will blinks, his skin tingles across his shoulder and he glances behind him. Just a second. Just to see, but all he sees from the dining room table is the back of the brown leather couch.

He sighs, shaking the little red bottle vigorously. He doesn’t look at her, he’s been avoiding looking at her since before he got home. Since before Jack came calling if he’s being honest with himself. “I’m not scared.”

“You’ve been through a lot,” she attempts to reason softly. “I know that you’re depressed and–“

“Molly, sweetheart,” the back of his neck tingles, he has to avoid looking behind himself again, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Talking could help.” She tries again, and she’s right, but there’s nothing he can say to her. There’s no truth he can tell her that won’t eat her up on the inside and have her filing for divorce before the end of the night.

Worst of all, she’s getting frustrated. A part of him is happy to see it, and a larger part of him feels guilty for causing it.

“What do you want me to say? You know what happened.” Will shrugs his good shoulder, stabbing a piece of shrimp with the fork he requested.

She knows an approximation of what happened, she knows the mythical but not the Biblical.

“Your feelings?” She tries, her voice raising an octave as she tries to keep her face neutral. “You’ll let yourself wither away. We can talk about this.”

Will’s tongue sours. “I have spent years trying to decipher how I feel. Things happened, I survived. That’s how it’s always been.”

Molly stares at him for a long moment. “I’m just trying to help.”

Will deflates; he leans back in his chair and scrubs his hand over his face. He liked it better when he said Hannibal Lecter was someone he never wanted to be mentioned in the house and she agreed. He never said why, and she believed what she wanted to about it. Maybe that’s where he fucked up; letting her believe whatever she wanted to.

“I know, it’s just a lot. I’m trying. Things are… different. I told you things would be different.” He takes a bite and a swig of his beer. “I just want this chapter in my life to be done.”

She reaches across the table and Will takes her hand, squeezing it once. Molly softens at the small gesture and Will, in turn, does the same.

“You’ll figure it out.” Molly gives him a small smile, and he thinks, for just a moment, that he actually believes her.

When he lays down in bed that night, he rolls over, rubs his hand over the curve of her body, and decides that maybe sex will make him feel better. It has before. In the beginning of their relationship, it did. Sex makes things easy to forget.

Something so primal, so innately human.

Killing with another, in a way, is similar. The intimacy is different, much more feral, but the emotional response is close, if not better in most ways. It’s better to share, this taboo secret

that isn't just a *hush hush* thing. It's vile, it's playing god, and for those few minutes, he felt like he truly belonged somewhere. Somewhere with Hannibal.

He's not a sexual sadist, but he does know that he never felt more emotionally or physically connected with another human being as he did that night on the cliffside. He knows the intimacy he conjures tonight will pale in comparison and he'll never reach that high again.

When Will fucks her, he closes his eyes. The room is dark and she won't know, and when he takes his cock in hand and slides it into her, he leans forward, pressing her thighs up against her shoulders, and places his full weight on top of her. This makes it easy, it makes it where he can't look at her if he doesn't want to.

That's not new. Will has been fucking his wife well before they married with his eyes closed, and he's always written it off as a fear of intimacy. What is new is that he can't keep his dick hard.

The wet, hot slide of his cock inside her isn't doing it for him. He can chalk it up to the medication, to the stress, to anything and everything in between, but he knows none of those things is the real answer to why.

"Fuck," he huffs, frustration leaking into the air around them. His dick softening within a minute of being inside her–he's never had this problem. Not once in his entire life but here they are. "I'm sorry, what the fuck."

"It's not a big deal, Will." She tries to soothe him, and he can tell she means it.

It upsets him though. He's her poor, wounded husband who she can forgive not being able to fuck her until her legs shake and they're three rounds in. No, he's broken and medicated and depressed and it's not a big deal.

Of course, she believes that. Medication and stress and fear and whatever else she feeds herself every night to avoid the fact her husband is grieving like he lives every day in the chapel of a funeral home.

He rolls onto his back, hand finding his cock. He squeezes from the base up to the tip, mind drifting to Baltimore. To dinners and firelight and the brush of a hand against his. He does this a few times before he turns back to his wife. "Lay on your stomach."

She blinks, taken aback slightly. "Oh?"

Will breathes, the weight of his fully hard cock in his hand. "Yeah. Let's… maybe I just need to try something new right now."

Molly flips over with no preamble and Will is on her in seconds. He grabs her hips, pulls them up in a firm grip, so he can line his cock up, and slides in. He curses under his breath, one of his hands between her shoulder blades as he rolls his hips.

This is better, he hates to admit. When he closes his eyes, he can imagine she's Hannibal. He's done it before but now is easier because if he does choose to look, he won't see her face.

Just the curve of her spine where he's pulled her up so he can fuck into her as he pleases.

She moans, hands gripping the bed sheets, and he feels some pride in that. In the way her thighs quiver and the sounds he pulls from her.

There's guilt there, too. More of an old sort of feeling, sprinkled with scripture he can't quite remember now, but he isn't willing to regret this. They're both getting what they want. How can that be wrong?

She comes first, legs sliding and Will follows her down until they're fucking flat against the bed. He almost bites into her shoulder but doesn't. It's a weird moment, and then he comes inside of her, hips stuttering, and it takes everything in him not to collapse on top of her.

"I love you," he says. His breathing returns to normal and the scar on his stomach tingles strangely.

Molly smiles at him. "I love you too, Will."

Chapter 4

There's this church in their town. Not Southern Baptist or Pentecostal like he was raised, but it has the same horrible energy. Every time he passes by, he gets this awful feeling in his chest, like someone is digging their fingers under his rib cage and is trying to pop each one out individually. He thinks it might be Methodist. Possibly even Advent, but Will never really paid it much more attention other than to make sure it wasn't like the churches his dad used to take him to.

Molly wasn't particularly religious, either, so it didn't really come up. They'd never discussed god aside from once when she asked him if he thought there might be one and all Will could think about was the fact that god gloated, often. He said he didn't really want to talk about it, and that was that. Religion was never important in their relationship, so he figured she didn't attend a church ever.

Besides, if she did, Will didn't care. That was her own business, and who was he to tell her she couldn't possibly find some form of comfort in the safety net religion often provided? Still, he was pretty certain she didn't and she definitely never asked him to attend.

That was until the congregation brought food to their house. The grace period was over, three and a half months since he was released from the hospital, and Will had started some freelance work again and that must have been good enough for the old women and it would be rude for him to deny them the pleasure of cooking for him–he was a fucking hero after all. He should accept it.

In the back of his mind, almost too clear, he could hear father chastising him for disliking the offer. For wanting to send all the women and men and their food away. Church people are good people, that's what his father always said. Maybe some are, he's not going to deny that, but the idea of them in his house makes his skin crawl.

They're thankful; they shouldn't be.

"I didn't know you were religious," Will says that Sunday morning when Molly broke the news to him that people would be coming to visit them. "You never told me."

She tilts her head slightly, scrubbing a plate in the sink. Her face is screwed up in a way it gets when she's trying to concentrate. "I'm not, Wally's just scared and my parents suggested it. They think it might, you know, help him."

Wally still hasn't come home. He has come to visit on occasion but he is scared of the house and scared that someone else might come back and hurt them again. Even when Will promised that the man was dead, it wasn't enough – it became its own thing.

So you're a killer too, then.

There was no winning. He accepted that very quickly and now he's just letting nature run its course. That's all he really can do, besides, he's too preoccupied with his own shaky stability

to worry about him. He'll figure it out and really the last thing he needs to worry about is a fucked up father figure who can't keep himself together. He knows that well enough.

Molly insists they'll mend soon. He's in therapy and they think he's making real progress, which means he spends more time at home, and less time everywhere else. This church thing is just another stepping stone, Will tries to reason. Something to make him feel secure.

"Yeah, I get that." Will shoveled another spoonful of cereal into his mouth. "Whatever helps."

He absolutely doesn't get it. He never felt anything warm or comforting about church, he didn't have happy memories of youth trips and pizza days. No, he remembers sitting in a pew and listening to a preacher squawk about burning in Hell and how every innately human experience was some great sin. That your thoughts alone were the Devil and how they'd send you to eternal damnation.

He guesses that maybe the concept of Jesus is nice enough. Wally is probably focusing on that, the comfort that often brought people. Maybe if you do die, there's a nicer place you can go. Yeah, he takes another bite of cereal and then fights to get the last few pieces onto his spoon. Must be the concept of Heaven, but even that–how does anyone know if they've been good enough? Is there a way to know?

Will always knew he was going to Hell, even before he met Hannibal, before he decided Hell wasn't real. He knew, if thoughts alone were enough, he was going to be cast into a lake of fire.

"Babe, have you seen the car keys?" Molly asks, snapping Will back to reality. She's finished the dishes and is looking over the table for the keys to her car. She's got to get drinks to offer to the people from the church. Sweet tea and beer and tap water probably weren't enough variety.

"What? No." He says, and he feels something cold against his shoulder. It tingles and he opens his phone to check the weather. "Haven't seen them."

There is a slight chance of rain, so he nods to himself and rolls his bad shoulder. The nerves are horrible now, every change of weather means it hurts–this doesn't hurt though–he rolls it again. His doctor said it'll probably only get worse with age and he should try his hardest not to cause any more damage to it.

"I swore I hung them up." She says, sighing.

Will finishes the cereal and chugs down the milk before taking the bowl and spoon to the sink to rinse out and clean. "Maybe they're in the bedroom? That's where they were last time."

She rubs her hand across her neck. "Yeah, maybe so."

The keys keep getting misplaced. It's odd, they never did before the Dragon, but a lot has changed. They're both still so on edge and disorganized, there's no telling where their minds

are. Besides, it doesn't matter, they always find them. Just… in weird spots sometimes. Under a couch cushion, in the medicine cabinet, under the bed.

Will's neck tingles so he makes a motion to crack it and see if that helps. It doesn't, but he did throw himself off of a cliff, he reminds himself, there's gonna be some nerve damage. Some residual pain.

After he finishes cleaning his bowl, he takes a shower. He has to if they're going to have guests, especially ones he doesn't know. His shoulder is scarred pretty badly; where the knife stabbed into his soft flesh is pink and slightly raised. It doesn't hurt anymore, but it still requires scar cream so it doesn't tighten. His cheek is a different story altogether.

The scar isn't horrible and he's shocked at how smooth it came out. (It's easily concealed by his beard either way.) The only problem he has with it is that it hurts. All the time. His shoulder might tingle and hurt when it rains or when the days suddenly drop in temperature, but his cheek is a constant pain he wasn't expecting.

He lives on tylenol and ibuprofen and nothing is helping. He has medication for nerve pain but he hasn't filled the prescription and doesn't think he ever will.

When he stands in the water, it makes his face twitch. The muscles reacting uncomfortably to the spray more than anything. He presses the heel of his hand against it but that just strikes pain through his face. It's worse if the water's cold, though, and it shouldn't be. Not really. It's all in his head, a psychological reaction because of how cold the Atlantic ocean had been.

The human body, whether consciously or not, can hold on to a great deal of trauma.

When he gets out he dresses, rushed and displeased. Nothing too nice, but a pair of khaki slacks and a dark button down does well enough. He touches his pinstriped button down, touching it, and wonders briefly if Hannibal would have liked it. He nearly wore it when he went to the BSHCI to ask him for help.

He moves from the closet and back into the bathroom, staring at himself in the mirror for a long while, droplets from his hair dripping and splattering against his shirt. He looks almost normal, like he's himself, like any other man someone might pass by in the street. The only proof the world will see that Hannibal Lecter ever touched him is the white scar across his forehead and as time passes, the color fades.

Soon, he won't even have that.

His hand touches his abdomen. Something about the scar on his stomach is so twisted, the pride he's begun to feel in it like it's some kind of medal. The proof that he knew Hannibal, and that Hannibal knew him. That he loved him, in his own fucked up way. Even if no one else ever sees it, even if everyone forgets that Hannibal marked Will, he'll always remember.

Molly and Wally are sitting in the living room when Will comes out. His hair has mostly air dried and he tucked his shirt in and found a nice enough leather belt to make it seem like he tried. He doesn't feel right. Something is off, something has been off, but he offers them both a smile forever crooked by a scar.

“Hey buddy,” Will says as he comes to sit down across from them on the recliner.

“Hey,” Wally says, quieter than the boy’s ever been.

He tries to give him a wide breadth when he’s home. He knows that Wally isn’t stupid, he’s a kid sure, but he knows that Will’s job led to them being attacked, he knows that it was, in so many ways, Will’s fault. He suspects the kid knows that Will was friends with the man who sent Francis to their house, in the weird way kids know everything.

Will glances at his wife for support on what to say next, but Molly gives him a very serious look in turn. Eyes narrowed, pointed, so he looks back at the boy. “How was church today?”

“It was okay,” he shrugs, picking his thumbnail awkwardly. “Mom said you could answer questions I had, that you were raised in church and stuff so you might know more than her.”

His entire body goes cold like a wave just crashed over him. Nothing has happened and he feels like he’s drowning, like he wishes he would have drowned in the Atlantic. Lungs filling with cold, salted water. He still could, he thinks. The beat of his heart is in his ears, thumping ridiculously, in sync with each cold wave that washes over him.

“I didn’t really pay attention.” That wasn’t the right answer, and Molly stands to go somewhere, to leave him to it. His eyes follow her out of the room, and he knows he’s been given a father-task. One he isn’t ready for. “I guess I know some. Is there… anything you want to know in particular.”

The room is silent for a while, and behind him he can hear Molly searching for something. She cusses under her breath, her wallet has disappeared from the kitchen table. He's silently begging that she’ll come sit back down, but ultimately, she disappears into another room to continue looking.

Wally’s face screws up the same way his mom’s does when he’s thinking really hard about something. Whatever it is, it’s probably something he’s trying to work up the courage to ask. Tongue pressed against his teeth, shoulders held up high. Will wants to tell him to just go ahead and ask.

His other shoulder tingles now, and it still hasn’t rained. There aren't even clouds in the sky.

Finally, Wally looks at him, eyes almost watery. “When you die, where do you go?”

“Thought you figured that out already. That’s usually the gist of church.” He tries to laugh like it’s a joke, but he won’t say Heaven. He’s not trying to lie to him. He doesn’t want to tell him something he doesn’t even believe in himself. “Where you go, how you get there.”

Wally picks at the skin around his thumbnail. That’s not the real question, Will can tell. “You killed people.”

Will shifts in his seat, rubbing his clammy palms against his pant legs. “Yeah, yes. For my job.”

“Do you think that man is going to Hell?” Wally asks. “Any of the men you’ve killed?”

The real question might be does Will think he's also going to Hell? He hates that his immediate response is yes, that the word ping pongs around in his head like an accusation. He doesn't even believe in Hell, he doesn't think that.

"Yes," he says because Molly reenters the room, just to pass through and look for her wallet in the laundry room, but he doesn't want to lie and he doesn't want to upset them so he settles on lying anyway. Seems like the easiest solution for now. "The man who attacked you went to Hell. The people I killed also went to Hell."

"What about the other guy?" He asks. By the way he shrinks and his eyes shimmer Will can tell he wasn't really supposed to ask that. "Is he–do you think he went to Hell, too?"

Will's eyebrows come together. "What other guy?"

"Mom said I'm not supposed to say his name. It upsets you." Wally looks at the door to where his mother disappeared and then back to Will. "The one who cut you. Is he in Hell too?"

Will thinks he might be sick, his tongue feels light and his mouth fills with saliva and there's the weird sense of being caught. For a moment he forgets he's not the kid in this situation and that Wally just has questions, not that he's accusing him of anything. Or… is he? Will isn't sure.

"Well, bad people go to hell, so maybe." Will nods mostly to himself. "Maybe."

He wonders if when Hannibal died he could still hear him. They say that hearing is the last thing to go. He wonders if he heard him laugh, if he heard him beg. Did it give him some kind of satisfaction to know that, even in his death, he held something over Will? Then he wonders if Hell is real and if Hannibal is there, somewhere. If he's happier there than anywhere else. He probably cursed god and laughed.

"I asked Preacher Donnie. He said if he asked Jesus into his heart, he went to Heaven." Wally looks at Will like he wants him to tell him Preacher Donnie died. "I hope he didn't. I hope they both went to Hell."

Will blinks, his hands tremble horribly so he clasps them as tightly together as he can imagine. Tight enough he thinks his knuckles might splinter. "Well, I doubt he did but we don't know."

Wally isn't pleased with that answer, shifting awkwardly in his chair, he clenches his hands into fists and sets them against his knees. "But how is it fair that people who did bad things their whole lives can just ask right before they die and get to go to Heaven?"

Will runs his tongue along the inside of his scar. "I don't think god works on fairness."

"How does that–"

Molly comes back into the room, effectively saving Will from explaining more. He's shaking now, he thinks, because she brushes his hand through his hair like he might do to a lost dog.

“The ladies from church are here Wally, why don’t you go greet them?”

He makes a face, unhappy, but stands to go greet them. They’re more his guests than anything, Will reasons. They don’t even know Will, only whatever Wally has said and whatever they’ve read on the news.

“I think church has become his own personal revenge.” Will tries to laugh, voice smaller than he expected. He wonders if he wants revenge against just Francis and Hannibal or also Will. Something tells him it’s all three of them. “He’s really interested in Hell.”

Molly sighs, watching the boy slip on his shoes and go outside. “Well, everyone wants a god that’ll punish the evil, whoever that god might be. It could be worse, after all.”

Will looks towards one of the windows, out into the woods by their house, wetting his lips with his tongue. He swallows around bile in his throat, but he can’t exactly place why this has upset him so much. Wally’s just a traumatized kid, that’s it. He shouldn’t be able to shake Will. “Yeah, it could be.”

Will takes a breath, scrubbing his hand over his face despite the pain, and stands. He’ll be on his best behavior for these people. They’re just trying to show how grateful they are for Will’s sacrifice.

Six women and two men come. One of them shakes his hand too tightly and introduces himself as Preacher Donnie. Three of the six people attempt to hug him and he gets away with side hugs. The house feels cramped and uncomfortable with this many people milling through it and Will manages to only look over his shoulder twice.

They bring what he expected. Potato salad and coleslaw and green beans and someone brings homemade rolls and one of the men made and brought a brisket. There are two desserts that he doesn’t touch, mostly because he doesn’t like jello and the other thing is covered in walnuts and personally, he’s not a walnut fan.

It’s an okay experience, at least he tries to convince himself that it is. They all praise him and tell him he’s a hero and that god gave him the strength to do what he did. It takes everything in him not to roll his eyes at the absurdity of it. If god is real and he did anything, he took Hannibal from him. It didn’t take strength to kill Francis, it didn't take strength to push them off that cliff. It took strength to drag Hannibal’s body to shore, to kiss his corpse, to wake up without him. God didn’t give him strength for that. He refuses to think god has anything to do with how he manages to get by each day. He refuses to thank a being that neither exists nor cares about him.

Still, he smiles, because that’s what Molly wants him to do and this is more for Wally than anything else. He has to keep telling himself that, if he’s going to stomach this at all.

Will gets up to get another plate, mostly just brisket, while Molly entertains. He wishes she would have given him a little bit more of a heads up so he could have really fitted himself to the occasion, but he understands that it was probably last minute and thrown on her, too.

One of the ladies from the church, which he has discovered against his will is actually a Presbyterian church, is getting a scoop of whatever jello-fruit hell mix was brought as a dessert. They're all nice, in the way church people tend to be. Fake, with the kind of joy that just isn't humanly possibleS

"Thank you so much for this food." He says it because it's the right thing to say and because he's starting to feel incredibly awkward by all the praise he's receiving. "It's really great."

"Of course, we wanted to do something, knowing what you did. Walter talks about you all the time." She nods, smiling. "You're really his hero."

"Oh, yeah?" Will blinks and forks a few pieces of meat onto his plate. He's a liar, he always has been. At no point in this relationship has he ever been one hundred percent honest, but it feels worse now that Wally talks about him at church. "Kids have a wild imagination, I was just doing my job."

She doesn't seem convinced by this, which is understandable, so she continues. "It must have been a terrifying ordeal for you. I know that he seemed mighty shaken by his own experience and you were alone with two of them."

"I've had worse." Will places his hand against the scar on his stomach without thinking, standing there like that for a minute. He doesn't know what to do, and he feels like leaving the conversation would be a problem. "Wally's a very strong kid, he's doing better than we ever could have imagined."

"Your little boy has been so scared for you, you know. He prays for you every Sunday. He wants you to get better, to feel better." The lady nods solemnly. "It would mean a lot to him if maybe you came to church, too."

Will feels a cold sweat on his neck. The ocean is back–no, not the ocean. This is different somehow. It's not salty at all, it's murky. "I'm not so sure about that. Church isn't my thing, personally."

"God can really help with your depression." She tries like she knows a damn thing about him. Like she even knows why he's depressed in the first place. "He can cure you of whatever ailment being around those two monsters may have put on you. It can be cleansed, you know."

Will's mouth fills with saliva and he looks away. He's not hungry anymore, and for a minute, he thinks he can smell wax candles. "Yeah…"

She pats his arm. "I hope you'll at least consider it."

He's not going to, but he thinks about what she said the rest of the time they're at their home. Cleansed. It feels gross, wrong. The entire implication that being near them, being near Hannibal, has degraded Will in some way makes him sick.

They didn't know Hannibal. They don't know what Will went through, how he mourns. They just know what a kid in church said about him. Probably mentioned how they can't even say

his name around the house.

He zones out of it for the rest of the conversation, going somewhere in his mind, going to Hannibal's warm office. He answers when he has to, laughing when it's appropriate. He holds Molly's hand and dotes on Wally, but he isn't there. He can't be.

He throws up three times after the congregation has left and it isn't because of the food. He tries to say it is but Molly and Wally are fine, he says maybe it's just him, maybe he was allergic to one of the ingredients or something.

He wipes his mouth, sat with his back to the wall in front of the toilet. That tingly feeling is all over his body and he just lets it. He doesn't try to shake it off, he doesn't try to reason it away, he just lets it envelop him and finds that it's almost comforting.

"I can't find the nausea medicine," Molly grumbles, digging through the medicine cabinet for the sixth time. "It doesn't make any sense."

Will hums in response, trying to keep from throwing up again. His stomach is nearly empty, and dry heaving will be so much worse. He just wants to sleep, that's it, it doesn't matter what he dreams about. Whatever it is, it can't be worse than this.

Eventually, he waves her off and tells her to just leave it. She gives him a cup of water and he chugs it, feeling like he might be sick again. He'll feel better in the morning, he tells her, he always does.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

a little alana moment for everyone, as a treat

Sometimes he wonders when grieving is meant to end. At what point does someone wake up and feel normal again? Will he ever have a day where he doesn't think about him, where he doesn't feel the warmth of his chest against his cheek? He thought he grieved Hannibal before, when he was arrested, when he gutted him and fled with Bedelia, when Hannibal let him sit in that cell. He thought all of that was this great triumphant feeling of true loss, like he had his heart cut and ripped and shredded on his ribs. That doesn't even touch whatever this is.

This is mutilated, depraved, gaunt. It demands so much of him, of his time, of his effort. It feels like he's being pulled in two directions, towards his wife and child and the other, towards a corpse. He's being ripped apart, slowly, and Hannibal has more stitching on him than Molly ever could.

The only reprieve he gets is in the mornings, the few seconds when he first wakes up and everything is so beautifully empty. He wakes up in a soft bed and all he considers is the sunlight pouring in and the heavy blanket across his body. There are mornings where he doesn't have that, not exactly. Mornings when he just dreamt of a life with Hannibal, something so far from here no one would know their names, and when he rolls over in the bed he sees Molly instead. Those mornings are worse.

It's one of those mornings.

He roughly pulls his work boots on, snatching them when they get caught on his heel. He'd dreamt of Hannibal, if a beach and a flower towel, and kissing him so tentatively that he laughed. When he woke up, he could only think about the sound of the ocean and the way Hannibal's lips felt against his.

In the kitchen, he hears one of the cabinets open, a slow creak that unsettles him. When he looks over, a pale white plate falls, shattering across the floor and then the cabinet slams shut again.

"What the hell." He ties off his boots before he stands. He hesitates, but nothing more.

He should, feasibly, be more terrified of this than he is, but this is just another thing in a long list of things that've been happening over the months since he returned home. Instead of losing his cool, he walks into the kitchen and stares at the shards, the way splintered and cracked ridiculously, before picking them up and trashing them.

When he turns to stare at the cabinet door, static fills his ears. Everything around him is silent aside from the buzzing. It's demanding, all consuming, and the longer he stares, the farther away he feels. It's just him and the cabinet and the anguish.

They exist together, in a different reality, one he created all his own. He's going to fall into one of the rooms of his Memory Palace if he isn't careful–he's started doing that. Living in a room, in a memory, just to look at Hannibal again.

"You're quiet this morning," Molly says, and he jumps, skittering across the tile floor, and damn near falling.

His heart rushes in his ears, and he has to catch himself on the counter so he doesn't trip and fall. Glancing over at her, his eyes are double their usual size. He stares like she's an unwelcome guest, and maybe she is at this moment. She looks comfortable, in a pair of Will's sweatpants and the baggy t-shirt she wore to bed.

He clears his throat, straightening up and pulling his shirt down from where it crinkled at his waist from the startle she gave him. He needs to be normal, and not so easily distracted; not so easily consumed. "Just thinking."

Scanning across his face, there's no humor in her gaze, she's looking for something. Trying to gauge whether or not he's hiding something from her. He always has been, and recently, he feels like she's only one step behind him. He wonders if she kissed him while he was in his coma, if she tasted Hannibal's lips? He wonders if he called out for Hannibal when he dreams, if she just doesn't care to acknowledge it?

No, Molly isn't like that. She's a better woman than that by all regards. If she had any inkling that Will was grieving a man she, by all accounts, hates then there would be issues. Hell, he's having issues with it himself. It's not easy, but the longer he sits on it the more he accepts the fact at hand: he really is in love with Hannibal Lecter.

He leans against the counter and offers her a smile. It's lopsided now, pulled oddly by the scar on his cheek, but it's enough to ease whatever suspicion was there.

She starts the stove, getting ready to make Wally his breakfast which was one of the stipulations for him to move back on. He got to have blueberry pancakes with whip cream every morning. "What about?"

His laughter holds a bitter undertone and runs his hands through his hair to tame it. "Nothing, it's stupid."

"Come on, Will." She teases, leaning over to put a hand on his stomach and kiss him. "Tell me, I promise it's not stupid."

He thinks for a moment, about something that's true and also not hard to hear – or hard for him to say. There are better conversations to be had over breakfast than ones that involve him disclosing the fact he dreams about Hannibal and most of them are actually really nice. Except for his recurring nightmares. The kitchen, in Florence, and now the ocean.

She doesn't know about the last two. Not in any great detail. He doesn't want to tell her about them either, they feel like his. Something private, something that should have told him he was in love years ago when he dreamed of Bedelia in his place. Of Hannibal and her eating him.

"I wish people would stop calling me a hero." He admits this, because he does, but that isn't what he was thinking about and that would be easy for her to stomach. "I don't feel like a hero."

"A lot of people feel more at ease knowing two serial killers are dead," she counters, but she's hardly arguing. "To them, you are a hero."

Will takes a breath, looking at the cabinet and then at Molly. "It wasn't like it was exactly my choice."

"You still did something good." She tells him confidently like she really believes it herself, and maybe she does. He's a good man, he did something good, he saved a lot of people by killing Hannibal Lecter (He didn't kill himself though, so how many people did he actually save). If that's true, why does it feel like he's doing something so wrong by being here?

"That's not what it is though," Will argues gently because he wants to be validated that something weird is going on, that this isn't in his head, but he doesn't want her to think about the real implications of it. "I don't feel like a hero, I haven't. Ever, but that isn't my biggest issue."

"Then what is it?" She asks, buttering the pan.

It sizzles, the aroma fills the kitchen slowly and he thinks that he'd like to stay and eat too. He won't, he has to leave for work soon and he already downed a protein bar and a cup of coffee, but he'd like to just be normal for five minutes over breakfast with his family.

He debates for a long second about what he should say, exactly. Long enough for her to get a nice bit of pancake batter onto the pan and flip the first one.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" He tries to play it off as a joke, half smiling and laughing to himself like it's absurd.

It should be absurd, like ghosts and god and demons are all in the same category for them. Fantasies, ones he likes to not consider except for when it makes Wally happy.

"Ghosts?" She chuckles, flipping the second pancake.

"Yeah. Ghosts. My dad never did, he always said they were demons." His dad said a lot of things, a lot of things he doesn't believe now. The demon line makes hardly any sense, considering he doesn't believe in them either.

He does feel the Judas, though, being taunted by the damned for giving up his Messiah to be slaughtered. Telling him to do it, to hang himself for something he was predestined to do.

"I don't think there are ghosts, I do think when you're under a lot of pressure your mind will play tricks on you, and with one like yours it's probably just," she pats his shoulder

meaningfully, “worse.”

Worse. Yeah, he knows it is. It’s hard to exist in a world where his mind has to play everything up. Things that have very logical explanations seem out of the ordinary and especially given the fact that he’s in such a weird place mentally, he’s sure it isn’t helping.

“A cabinet door opened, and a plate fell out. It shut again.” Will tells her, looking over at it like it may do it again, even though he knows it won’t.

“It probably just wasn’t in there good, Will, and there’s a draft.” She reasons.

Both of those things are likely, but a draft wouldn’t slam it shut. Not unless it was bad enough, but he hadn’t noticed anything that really needed fixing, except the window said draft tended to come from.

“Weird things keep happening.” He tries again, hoping that she’ll corroborate his story, and he knows she’s noticed it too. She has to have noticed the missing items. How weird it is that little things keep going missing, how their phones die so easily, how the tv will just change channels randomly.

“Things aren’t going to be normal for a long time, you’re paranoid. You went through an extremely traumatic event.” Molly kisses his cheek, rubbing her hand just below the scar on his abdomen. “Why don’t you call Alana? Talk to her about it? She told me when you were in the hospital if you needed anything at all, just to call.”

Will sighs, he places his hand over hers. It seems like a sweet gesture, she’ll take it as one, but he’s actually trying to ensure she doesn’t touch his scar. “Yeah. I might, she’ll probably psych me out until I feel better.”

That’s really what he needs, to be talked out of this. He thinks his dad did that when he was little, talked him out of his weird feelings about death. At least, he always said he did. He hardly remembers his mother’s death, but apparently it became something of an obsession of Will’s if his dad’s drunk ramblings were anything to go by.

Alana will be nicer, she’ll give him the facts. She’ll tell him what he needs to hear. It’ll be good to talk to her too, they haven’t spoken since everything happened. He’s sure she has ideas of what happened, maybe better ones than others in his life.

“I love you, have a good day at work.” She says before flipping one of the pancakes on a plate. “Shrimp and grits for dinner tonight.”

Will’s lip twitches, enough to make his scar move strangely. He waits a few seconds and then smiles. “I love you too.”

Today, his truck starts without a problem and he drives for a good twenty minutes before he pulls off into the empty parking lot of an old strip mall. The only two things still open in it are a nail spa and a dollar store. He decidedly parks in front of the dollar store.

He debates calling at all, he debates it for so long that he's going to be late for work and he'll have to haul ass to be where he wants to be in his different projects. He doesn't care, he thinks he should. He thinks it should matter to him, it did before, or he liked to pretend it did when it was easy to view his family as a doll set.

In the end, he gives in and calls her. It's the same number it's always been, which shocks him just a little bit. She lets it ring a good three times before finally picking up. It makes Will more anxious than he should be. There's nothing particularly strange about it, but he was hoping she'd either answer immediately or let it go to voicemail.

"Will?" She questions, but she doesn't sound remotely surprised.

He bites at the corners of his fingers until they're numb and then harder, enough to have a drop of blood touch his tongue. "Hey, Alana."

Both ends sit in silence for upwards of thirty seconds. It's like they both have something, something they only understand, but something that could never touch in a way that matters.

Finally the other end crackles and he hears her sigh. "Jack told me you'd probably call me, I expected it to be sooner. I told Molly you could call, too. If you needed it."

Will licks his chapped lips and thinks about if he's going to ask the second person in less than an hour this same question. He is, he knows he is, but he'd like to pretend he isn't.

"Yeah. Listen, I don't have a lot of time to talk. I just wanted to ask you a crazy question." He can see her having him admitted for a 72 hour psychiatric watch. Having him admitted until he's better–he fears he won't ever be better.

There's a pause on the other end again, and each time she does this it startles him. "Okay…"

"Do you believe in ghosts?" He asks, a little too quickly for his liking.

Now that he's voiced it a second time he realizes how incredibly stupid it is. What are they? 12? Asking each other at a sleepover if anyone has any true ghost stories to tell. He wishes he could take it back.

Another pause, and then she says something to someone in the room with her–most likely Margot. "Will, you can't be serious."

"Listen, I know it sounds crazy but weird things keep happening. Stuff falls off the tables, out of cabinets, my keys or Molly's keys go missing. My truck won't start sometimes. It's weird." He hates that he sounds desperate, he hates that he wants her to believe him. "When I was a kid I remember weird stuff happening after my mom died."

"I think you're experiencing Post Traumatic Stress and I think that's coupling with your already overactive mind." Alana pauses, and he hears the click of a door, meaning she's excused herself. "And I know you're mourning him."

His throat dries immediately, and when he speaks, he croaks. "What?"

No. No, she can't say that to him. She can't know, that isn't fair. It's supposed to be his secret, his alone, and if she knows then anyone could know. Anyone.

He feels like a kid again, kissing a boy and then being slapped in the face by his dad when the boy confessed his bisexuality in church. Not his own, but Will's. Telling the congregation that he worried for his friend, who had a strange affliction for both men and women.

His body responds, hand gripping the phone so tightly that he shakes and he fears it'll break – he doesn't know why. It's not even about what Hannibal was, it's about the idea of someone knowing he felt anything outside of platonically for another man and it's Alana he's talking to. Alana, who is married to a woman, she should be the least horrifying person to know this about him.

For a quick second he wonders if everyone knows. It was fine when it was just himself that knew, but he doesn't know if he can handle it if every person he's ever known could tell.

The grip on his phone makes his shoulder ache worse than it has been, the scar from the knife throbs, and his fingers tingle. Not the kind where he's confused by it, but the kind that means he has nerve damage and he's upsetting it.

"I don't get it, I won't, I'm not even going to try. You have a good life, I understand why you wouldn't want anyone to know, I'm not telling anyone, but sometimes when people we love die we think we see them, or they're still here trying to comfort us." She says gently, like he might break if she talks any faster. "It's a very human experience, Will."

He takes a long suffering breath. He is eased by the fact that it seems only she's aware, but it doesn't disperse the tension in him that someone knows at all.

It is a human experience though, of course, he knew that. He can recall vaguely seeing his mother's face in crowds after her death. Running up to people who weren't there trying to find her. He recalls it with Abigail too, except it was a less intense feeling of being watched, of seeing someone in the crowd and confusing them for a brief moment.

"Yeah, yeah I know. It's just–shouldn't I be over it by now?" He leans forward, resting his forehead against the steering wheel. "I have a wife and child who are very much alive. Shouldn't that help?"

"You went through a lot these past few years. You witnessed two men kill each other, one of them physically attacked you–well both of them. You fell off a cliff. You need a break." She says, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. Like he should have come up with that himself. "Stop letting people galavant you around, making you something you aren't. Be Will. Be asocial, collect yourself in the ways you know how."

"A break." He swallows that down like crackers and stale wine.

"A vacation, away from everything. You need to get yourself sorted." She answers easily. "If you want to be a good husband and father you need time away from your marriage to… feel your feelings without guilt. Just a few days to process everything. You won't get over it, but you can learn to live with it."

“Okay, that sounds–I can do that.” He decides, nodding against the steering wheel.

He can go on a fishing trip. Just himself. Alone. That’s fine, he’ll work out whatever this is. He’ll compartmentalize it, shove it down somewhere he never has to touch or see it again unless he absolutely wants to. He can do that, he’s done it before. He did his best at it for three years.

“Good, and listen if you ever–“

The phone dies, despite having had 73% when he called her, and he’s not surprised by it, but he pulls it back from his ear and stares at it blankly. The buzzing starts again, in his ears.

His expression sours, the collection of everything settling him off, and he tosses his phone a hair too hard into the dashboard. It bounces off and lands in the passenger side seat, screen cracking in the process.

He’s thankful he didn’t shut the truck off as he pulls out of the parking lot. He’s sure the battery would have died too, which really would have been his luck. Stranded in the middle of fucking nowhere.

There’s a good possibility he’s going insane, or maybe he’s just trying too hard to be okay. Alana’s right, she tends to be about things like this specifically. He needs to collect himself, he needs to have the space to do that without needing to perform for his family.

He needs to figure out how he feels and why he feels it and what’s the best course of action for himself and his family going forward. No matter what that may be.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

okay guys here we go !

He stands next to his truck, Winston's already in the passenger side ready for the trip down South. His tail thumps happily against the seat, and Will leans across to scratch behind his ear, mumbling about how he's such a good boy for coming with him this time. Usually, he wouldn't let him come along, it's hard to travel such a long distance with a dog, but he feels like he might need to this time. For his own sanity.

In the bed, he's got his fishing rods, two tackle boxes, and a special container for his more delicate lures. His bag's shoved between his seat and the back of the truck and since he only plans to be gone for a few days he's packed lightly enough that he was able to fold the duffle.

The time he'll be gone is hardly enough to count, he thinks. Just enough to come to terms with his own emotions, mourn without worry about how it might affect his family, and then come back to be the sort of man he was never supposed to be – even if that isn't what he wants at all, even if he's thought about taking this trip and then just never returning, disappearing, letting this part of his life rest and die.

The closer this trip has come, the more worried he is that these are feelings he can't squash. Hell, he hadn't planned to ever see Molly again after they killed the Dragon anyway, so maybe this is just how it's going to be. There were only two options he felt were available to him–run away or die together–and he fucked them both up so terribly that now he's living in a constant cycle of despair with a woman and child who don't deserve that.

Now, with his fingers behind Winston's ear, he wonders if he should have tried to run or if he should have taken his own life on the beach. He definitely knows he wouldn't have pushed them over if he knew this would be his life now. Even if it frightened him to accept he was a killer, even if he was scared to admit he wanted Hannibal more than he'd ever wanted anyone else, he would have dealt with those ramifications better than these. He shouldn't be here, living in Molly's house, and he knows it.

He rolls his shoulders and pushes himself out of the truck when he hears Molly's car come to a rolling stop. She just picked Wally up from school, and he wanted to tell Will bye. Surprisingly, he wants to see him, really, the distance in their relationship has only gotten wider and with it, he feels Molly drifting too. It makes him wonder how much of their own relationship has hinged on Wally having a stable father figure in his life, which is fine, he can't say he married her out of love alone either.

Will is unwell, they can both tell, they just don't know why and it's ruining what stability they created. He's sure Molly keeps telling herself it's the trauma and tells Wally the same thing. Promising him that Will is going to get better, these things just take time. It's not, at least, not in the way she thinks. At any rate, she's a good woman and she's determined to see Will through this, even though he did tell her if he came back he wouldn't be the same and she seemed to think he was being a tad bit dramatic at the time.

He takes a breath, forcing himself to smile. At least she knows better now.

"I'll be back in a few days," he says to Molly when she gets out of her car. And, in an attempt to soothe her, he adds, "I'll bring you something back."

She isn't fond of this at all, but Alana said it was what he needed, and she trusts Alana (maybe even more than Will right now), and she really just wants her husband back. That's an understandable desire, being involved with Will has really turned her entire life upside down and that's unfair. He knows that, he acknowledges it. He made a promise to her, to her son, the best thing he can do now is try and figure himself out and decide what to do next. Whatever that is.

"Call me when you get there?" She asks, taking his hand in hers and squeezing it three times.

She looks hopeful, which almost calms Will's nerves. (Maybe it would if Will hadn't watched his dresser draw open and close three times that morning.) He isn't willing to take that for her though, so he rubs his thumb across her knuckles.

"Of course, I will." Will kisses her cheek, squeezing her hand back in the process.

When he looks at her, he feels silly for all of this. It would have saved them both so much if he died too, or wasn't scared of being with Hannibal. She could have moved on with her life, he could have been with Hannibal dead or alive, the way it should be. Yet, here they are, trying to make something that was bound to fail somehow work.

"How long are you going to be gone?" Wally asks, he's mostly behind his mother, looking at him with the same suspicion he's had since he saw Will for the first time after they killed the Dragon.

Kids just know things, even if it takes them time to figure it out. They see things too, and Will hasn't been completely convinced Wally's only reason for hating the house was because of the Dragon. Still, he hears his mother. Your father's sick, but that translates to something else in a kid's mind. Something closer to the truth.

Will sighs, "just until Monday. I'll be back by dinner, maybe if we're lucky your mom'll make chocolate delight for dessert."

He kisses Molly again, gives Wally this horrible side hug, and they exchange I love you's. Well, Molly says I love you, and Will responds with Love you too. Wally doesn't give him the pleasure, and he can't say he blames him for it.

He slides into the truck with ease, waving goodbye once more before pulling off and down the driveway. It's a long drive down to Louisiana, one he hasn't taken in years, and he isn't even sure he wants to go there but he is.

If he's feeling generous, he might even visit his father's headstone in the old pentecostal church where they put the marker. Of course, he didn't pay for the thing, the congregation did, once the five year mark was up and he'd been missing long enough to be legally declared dead, they set up a spot for him and everything. He thinks they took pity on Will, or they just really liked his dad. Probably a mix of both.

Sometimes, on the strange occasion where his chest is caught funny, he thinks about burying the bones there, but he isn't even sure he'd know where to find them anymore. The bayous have changed so much since he was 18, and he had buried him deep enough in the wild that no one would find him, even if the soppy mud eroded away, nothing but the bugs and worms and maybe a few vultures.

A part of him nearly feels guilty about it, but he's been feeling guilty about some of the deaths he's caused.

He dispels this thought almost immediately. He doesn't owe that man anything, and definitely doesn't owe him the privilege of reopening that case. Instead of thinking about it, he clicks on the radio and searches around until he finds the classic country radio station and lets it sit, letting the words of Johnny Cash, Hank Sr, Loretta Lynn, and the likes fill his head. He knows the way home, he doesn't have to think to get there and Winston has always been a good riding partner.

He stops twice to let Winston out, once at a rest area in Virginia, and then again at a gas station at the top of North Carolina. It's late the second time they stop, the sun has been down for ages, and they're both getting antsy from sitting in his truck for so long. Tomorrow, he knows, is going to be another day of driving, so he gets a coffee from the 7-eleven, two slim jims, and fills the truck up.

He gets through the drink faster than he should, finishing it before he even finishes pumping his gas. When he gets in, he feeds one of the slim jims to Winston and eats the other one before driving half a mile up the road to one of the cheap motels on this exit.

This one is probably the least drug infested, it's two floors and the only vehicles in the parking lot is a work truck and an old busted up Toyota. Either that or it has a bedbug infestation and he's going to be dealing with that for weeks.

The guy up front is a middle aged man with slicked back hair and a strange way of pronouncing his vowels that makes Will's skin crawl. He also upcharges him fifty dollars to keep Winston in the room, but he doesn't fight it. He's decided to have a good weekend, he doesn't need petty quarrels to get in the way of his… healing. If that's what he's calling it, anyway.

It takes three times to swipe the card before it finally unlocks the door. When he opens it, he's hit with the scent of mildew. Stagnant, like no one's opened the door in weeks. The light in the center of the room takes five seconds after the switch is flipped to even come on, and

when it does he isn't greeted with a decent sight. Balding carpet, a broken closet door, and there are dead flies stuck to a flytrap.

"Yeah, and the dog's the problem." He grumbles to himself and throws his bag on the hard bed, hard enough that he knows it's going to hurt his shoulder. He finds the outlet and plugs in his phone which has been sitting at a worrying 17% for the last thirty minutes before he slips into the cramped bathroom to shower.

The shower tiles are yellowing and the water reeks of chlorine, screaming from the pipes as it soaks him down until his skin is red.

The trip, for the most part, has been smooth sailing. Aside from the fact his phone won't keep a charge, nothing strange has happened to him, and it allows him to breathe for a moment, to feel relief. Maybe it really is all in his head, maybe he just wants Hannibal to be there so bad he's freaked himself out. It wouldn't be the first time, he knows, his dad used to always laugh that Will would try and talk to his mom even after she was dead and cold.

When he comes out, he drip-dries in front of the sink as he brushes his teeth. He'd rather soak their floor than risk a towel, and once he deems himself dry enough he puts on a shirt and underwear, and pulls his phone off the charger to call Molly.

It's only gone up 3% which isn't really right. He stood in the shower without doing anything at all for well over twenty five minutes, but the charge has barely moved and it blinks back at him, telling him it's low. He chalks it up to bad amps in the wall, or even that his phone has finally let its end.

He plugs it back in and lays on his back over, uncovered. He's got a blanket on the truck but he isn't willing to go get it now and the room is humid enough that he doesn't think he'll need it anyway.

Winston curls up beside him on the bed and he stares up at the ceiling. There's a brown ring of water damage in the corner by the bed and he's sure if he moved the bed over, he'd see where the carpet was coming up with mold and residual water. For a moment, he almost feels normal–well, like he's sitting in a motel room waiting to check out a case. He hates that that feels normal, he hates that it feels like Hannibal should knock on the door to his room with food and some metaphor he won't understand until it's too late.

He decides to call Molly anyway, even if it's late, even if she's probably asleep.

It rings twice and then goes silent, at first he thinks maybe she's answered, but when he pulls the phone from his ear and looks at it the screen's black and when he tries to click it back on, nothing happens. He sighs, plugs his phone back in, and flops back down beside Winston.

"Am I crazy?" He asks the sleeping dog. "There's no way I'm not. It's all… coincidental and I'm turning it into something more. Maybe my brain's on fire again."

Winston stretches, and puts his head on Will's stomach. He doesn't seem phased by Will's questioning, not that he would be, but Will just wishes he would be. That some living

breathing creature would be phased by any of this, but the lack of it from anyone he knows has him uncomfortably alone. Maybe that's the real problem, maybe he's just alone.

Hannibal's dead, he knows it, he felt his cold lips against his and knew he wasn't coming back no matter how hard he tried. With him dead that means there is no one who knows Will, who understands him, who sees him. There's no one left he can be himself with.

"Yeah, it's just crazy. Logically, I know this is insane." He takes a breath, tears burn around the corner of his eyes and he has to take a few seconds to make sure they don't fall, "and I'm even crazier for talking to a dog, Christ."

Will leans over and clicks off the lamp beside him, swallowing down all the feelings in his chest and forcing himself into a restless sleep.

Sometime while he's sleeping, Will feels the bed move. At first, he thinks Winston has moved from his spot, moving to try to find, as futile as it is, a more comfortable spot on the bed. Will doesn't move, but when he's nearly asleep again he hears Winston bark, once, twice, three times in a row. It's not a growl, nor is the bark threatening, it's much more playful than anything. Icy cold air hits Will like the room dropped ten degrees in a matter of seconds and a familiar tingling sensation settles on his ankle.

The entire ride he hasn't felt it, not once. He thought maybe it was over, but no, he feels it now.

His heart slams, blood rushing through his ears loudly as something that isn't quite anxiety falls over him. Winston barks again, and Will feels the vibrations of his tail hitting the bed. He swallows and moves quickly to turn on the light, throwing himself from the bed to look around the room, but when he stands by the door he realizes it's empty and Winston is sitting in the middle of the bed with his tongue out, looking at one of the corners.

He takes a shaky breath, heart still raging in his chest, and settles back down against the bed, clicking the light off again. "I was having a weird dream and you scared me, buddy, don't do that to me. I'm getting too old for that."

The next morning he loads Winston into the truck earlier than he originally planned, ready to move along. He wants to make good time, he's got just under 13 hours to go and if he's lucky he'll make it to New Orleans in time to get food from somewhere good.

He calls Molly, finally, once he's been on the road for three hours and he knows she's awake.

The conversation is brief.

"Yeah, I think maybe my phone battery's just done for. Probably time for an upgrade." He laughs, "I tried to call last night but it died as soon as I took it off the charger."

Molly's cooking breakfast and he can hear the tv running in the back. Something Wally's watching, he's sure. "Good, we can probably get that sorted out when you get home. You got a package in the mail, by the way. Haven't opened it, something from the FBI." She pauses to

say something to Wally. “I figured you probably wanted to open it, I think it might be your clothes from that night and I don’t want to mess with it without you.”

Will’s silent for a moment, his stomach drops and his mouth dries like he’s just swallowed a mouthful of cotton balls. He knows his clothes will stay in an evidence box until Quantico rots, he knows what’s in that box.

“Hopefully,” he tries to force a laugh after he realizes he’s been quiet too long, “anyway, I just wanted to call you and tell you I should be there around seven. Just leave the box on the dresser, I don’t want you to have to deal with it, okay?”

He can hear the clink of plates. “Of course, babe. You’re up early then?”

He breathes, smiling. He knows his voice is happier than it has been. “Yeah, I wanted to get a head start on the day, I’ll probably text you when I get there to try and preserve the battery as long as possible.”

“Okay babe, I’ll see you when you get home. I love you.” He can hear her smiling into the phone.

Will hesitates, but only for a second. “Love you too, Molls.”

The rest of the drive consists of fast food, three stops at one rest area and two gas stations, and a lot of classic country that eventually bleeds into classic rock. He feels at peace, knowing what’s waiting for him at Molly’s house. A little melancholy, but he never thought he’d get Hannibal’s ashes. He was sure Chiyoh would make herself known by now, but he’s not going to lose sleep over it. He’ll just have to figure out something to tell Molly.

The sun’s going down when he gets into New Orleans, and he finds a nicer motel this time. It has enough cars, ones that are hanging on by zip ties alone, in the parking lot and the price is about eighty dollars more a night, so he considers it to be good enough. When he parks he scrolls through the contact in his phone. He waits a long while, until Winston whimpers to get out before he texts Jack. A simple thank you, he knows he had to pull strings to get that to happen.

When he goes into the room, he isn’t assaulted with the stiff scent of mildew and rotting drywall, and the bed isn’t nearly as hard, but the blanket is a sensory nightmare so he strips it off the bed and tosses it. He gets his blanket out of the truck and lays it flat.

He debates staying in the room the rest of the night and ordering to go, but decides he’ll visit his father’s headstone tonight rather than waste any good daylight tomorrow being there. He’s in a good enough mood to see it, he thinks, and besides that, he doesn’t want to see other people if he doesn’t have to.

Now, he rolls down the window and lets Winston stick his head out like he knows he’s been dying to go. He likes that better, having hated the interstate. His father’s church is a little under an hour away, in the same backwater town he was raised in. It’ll be closer to nine by the time he gets back, so he figures he’ll just pick up something on the way back.

Thirty minutes into the drive, when they're out of the city and it's dark enough to be frightening, the radio cuts out, crackling bleeds through, and Winston moves from the window and stares at Will. His lungs feel like they might burst, the crackling and the dog staring at him gets his skin crawling but just as soon as it happens, the radio clears and Winston turns back to shove his head out the window.

Will's lip trembles, but he tries to shove it down. It's fine, weird things happen out here. It's always been that way. Even when he was a kid.

He pulls into this church, and he recognizes it the way kids recognize their childhood home once it's been sold and redone. His dad forced him to go to whatever church was available to them as they moved, but any time they were home he always went here and was always forced to dress his absolute best. The building is menacing in the dark, chipped white paint and huge old doors. He thought it was scary as a kid too. There's a light pole in the front that's emitting this horrible yellow coloring over the entire place that just adds to his already anxious state.

It takes him longer than it should for him to force himself out of the car, but he has to remind himself that everything is in his head. A lot of things have always been in his head and he has something waiting for him at home. This is just a thing.

Winston follows behind him as he opens the old iron gate and walks toward the back. The last time he was here, god he doesn't know how long it's been. Maybe a few times after his father's death, but even that was years ago and he never stepped foot in any part of the church, only the graveyard. He reminds himself that there's nothing out here scarier than what he's seen with his own eyes, and with that, he puts to rest whatever childish fears he has.

His father's headstone is towards the back, alone, where most of the unmarried people here. His mother's buried in South Carolina with her family, and his father had plenty of relationships after her death but nothing that ever stuck, nothing that would ever warrant him having a conjoined plot. He deserves that, to be alone in death. Here and in the bayou.

Grass is overgrown around it and the stone itself has a layer of algae on it from constant rain. In the dark, he can hardly make out his name, and he hopes it slowly erodes until it's impossible to know. A cold case and a headstone with no name.

He stares at it, knowing that there's nothing there to stare back and feels cold again. It engulfs him, comforts him more this time than whatever the hell was happening last night. For a few seconds he lets the feeling overtake him, the cold and the tingling and he settles into it.

Winston barks, drawing him out of the feeling, and he turns away from the grave.

In the corner of his eye, he sees a building, small and white with kudzu and moss up the sides of it. There's a padlock on the front, rusted, like it hasn't been opened in years. Probably where they used to hold events, dinners and so on, stuff his father never took him to. Winston's standing by it, circling oddly, and when Will takes a few steps towards the building to call him over, he catches a glimpse of himself in the glass and the color drains from his face.

His immediate reaction is to vomit, doubled over, retching all the food from the day up into the grass, and splattering around the graves. Sweat freezes his neck, and tears form in his eyes, streaming down his face, until he's dry heaving and stumbling backward.

There's a chair in the building, singular, in the middle. He can still see it there, made of a good sturdy wood. He's sitting in it now–then, forced down and not allowed to move. The elders, stood around the chair in a circle, laying hands on him, reciting scripture, speaking in tongues while he cried for his father.

Richard Graham was in a corner of the room, hands clasped together as they smeared holy water across his forehead until he was pouring sweat in the Louisiana heat and scream-begging for them to stop. He looked up, he remembers, and held out his hand and asked mommy, help me! His body convulsed from the stress, seizing. He couldn't have been older than five.

Stumbling forward, he pulls his keys from his pocket as he slips over rain-wet stone and nearly falls on his face. He doesn't bother to shut the gate once he's out of there and instead places both of his trembling hands on the hood of his truck. He feels sick again but there's nothing left for him to throw up. He leans forward and presses his forehead against the hood, trying to settle himself again. Winston winds himself through Will's legs and whimpers.

He stands there for far too long, whispering to himself that he's okay over and over. Eventually, he stops crying and he's able to push himself up. The cicadas sing and lightning bugs zip around him.

Will wipes his eyes and then his mouth, taking a final breath to collect himself. He's fine. That was… a long time ago. Long enough that he'd managed to compartmentalize it and shove it in a box in a room he never went to.

He steps around Winston to open the truck door and let him in. The dog whimpers again when Will stands at the door and he laughs, "I'm fine, buddy."

When he gets in his truck, he keeps the window rolled up and the radio off as he drives back to the motel. He doesn't want to think about what happened, but he knows what it was. He knows why it happened. Little kids see things, sure, but his empathy disorder was always something different. Something he forced into certain parameters to please his father, to never have to experience that again.

He doesn't stop to get food, but he pulls out the bag of food he packed for Winston and feeds him. Inside the room, he takes a shower, brushing his fingers over the scar on his stomach over and over until the smell of chlorine burns his nose. Once he's done, he gets out and brushes his teeth and lays down in the bed under his blanket.

The message he sends to Molly is short. *Made it safe, love you*. He turns his phone off for the rest of the night, he decides. He doesn't want to deal with his life.

In the back of his mind he can hear scripture and tongues. He remembers his father telling him it was for his own good, that what he was seeing was the devil. That he was born with the devil in him and they were going to get it out.

Time ticks, he must lay there for nearly 45 minutes before he sighs, eyes closed. There's only one way to know for sure. His lips part, he waits like he might change his mind and then he goes, "Hannibal?"

Winston moves, his tail hitting the bed, and the end of it sinks slightly, the tingling returns to his ankle, and the room drops in temperature again. "Hello, Will."

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

this got way out of hand but i’m happy with it <3

There’s something to be said about grieving someone privately, someone no one else will miss outside of a group of strange and peculiar people and maybe their immediate family, if they even have that.

Will still remembers how Hannibal's name slowly started disappearing from the world, out of tabloids and news articles and even Tattlecrime (however, he’s rather suspicious about that, now that he thinks about it). He remembers the first day Freddie Lounds posted about something else, about a new killer the FBI was chasing after. It felt like hitting the water again, like being carried to the back building of a Pentecostal church with the intention of removing sin, it felt like sitting in the front row of an eternal funeral that no one else could ever attend.

Hannibal will always be notorious, he’ll still be the sort of serial killer people freak out over and research in secret, but he would never be here. He won’t be talked about publicly unless it’s the 10th, the 20th, the 30th anniversary of his death and they do a documentary about that night and call Will up and he’ll have to lie and say he did what he had to. He’ll be the poor American hero, and Hannibal, the monster on his shoulder.

At least, all those thoughts bounce around in his head and then bleed out through his eyes as he stares at the figure sitting on the edge of his bed. It’s too dark to make out his face, but Will could pick Hannibal out by the curve of his body alone.

Hard and uncontrollable, he cries. The emotions batter his lungs and ribs like hellfire until he can’t breathe even if he tries. He heaves instead, trying to calm his racing heart as his body is wracked with a confusing combination of relief and fear and anger. The more he wipes his eyes, the more the tears come, a world killing flood and he isn’t even the person chosen to be saved. Worse, he isn’t sure why he’s crying at all. It makes him feel childish, in the front row of church, crying because of the feelings that overtake him, and all it is is just loud music and a thunderous, commanding voice.

The room is dark and freezing, the only light comes from the sliver of moonlight that leaks into the inky darkness through where the curtain doesn’t quite pull together. It doesn’t touch Hannibal, but Will wonders if it would shine right through him or if he’d simply evaporate the moment pale light touched him or if he would just be there.

When he catches a singular breath, he uses it to talk, fast and strangled and horridly angry. “What the fuck, Hannibal? You know I’ve thought I was crazy for months now and then you

just, do this? Do you know how much I fucking hate you."

"I didn't think you would ever be able to see me," Hannibal says, a mix of astonishment and bemusement but serious enough that Will can tell he isn't exactly joking. "I won't apologize for the measures I took but I do hope you can understand I never meant to make you feel as if you were losing your mind."

"First time ever," Will laughs, choking down gulps of air. He wipes his face again, a little too roughly, as more tears spill from his eyes. "Holy shit, I can't believe this."

He can't believe it, he shouldn't. He's smarter than this, he knows the psychological implications this has, how grief changes people, messes with their minds, and destroys their sense of reality. However, his sense of reality is so skewed, and has been, he doesn't know what to make of this. He doesn't know if he should analyze it more or let it rest. All he's had for months is this feeling of remorse and eyes on him.

Hannibal rubs his thumb over his ankle, and while he doesn't feel the weight of his hand, he feels the same consistent tingly he had been feeling since the hospital. It adds to his confusion, how he can feel it but not and how he sees the hand on his ankle but he knows it's not really there. His mind is trying to catch up to what he's seeing, to make sense of it, but this is illogical. It's like a raccoon in his chimney.

Eyebrows knitting together, Will's hand moves from his face to his hair. The air around him is so cold he can see his plumes of breath, and he vaguely smells sulfur. "You've been here the whole time?"

"Yes," Hannibal nods, "watching over you."

Like a guardian angel, but not, because Hannibal couldn't be an angel if he tried. He's done too much bad in his life. However, Will's mother was, he thinks, and his father traumatized him so horribly that he never acknowledged her presence again and then, he stopped seeing her altogether. Vaguely, he can recall her sitting on his bed, rubbing his back after he had a nightmare. The entire time he pretended he was still asleep.

Hannibal's something darker, but somehow, safer, like he always has been. It doesn't settle Will though, to consider the possibility that Hannibal is here and has been this entire time. Actually, it feels incredibly fucked up. What has he seen? His breakdowns? The way he could hardly get out of the bed for weeks? Him fucking Molly?

That thought alone makes his stomach flip, warming up in a way it hasn't since before he threw them off that cliff. Both in dread and in a near disgusting sense of excitement, his cock twitches, and he thanks god for the blanket over his lap.

Will wets his lips and pushes that thought far away. It only solidifies that he's officially lost it if he dwells on it; why would he want Hannibal to have seen him and his wife in that way? Who does that benefit? It's repugnant at best, and something he nearly feels shame over.

With that thought he moves to consider the most important aspect at hand – he has to stop crying, stop thinking altogether, before he can consider the logistics of this, before he can

pick apart whether this is real or a delusion or a dream. He just needs to take a second, to empty his mind and his emotions and then think about this. It feels like a losing battle, but for a few seconds, he gets it under control enough to look at the dark silhouette of Hannibal.

“God, I mean, this isn’t possible,” his voice breaks off into another sob as his own words hit him. Saying it out loud worsens his fears. “I’m dreaming, no I’ve fucking lost it. Maybe I have encephalitis again, maybe I'm just crazy.”

“Will.”

His body trembles and his mouth fills with saliva and bile he has to swallow down. “I’ve been making it up in my mind this whole time because I couldn’t cope and now I’m hallucinating you.”

He stands, and Winston moves to watch him as he paces around the room. The first thing he does is pull his hair, pain is easy, pain reminds him of the reality he’s living in. If this was a dream he wouldn’t feel it, so when he snatches and then flinches, he knows that he’s awake. Awake and more than likely hallucinating–what a terrible fate.

He hasn’t had hallucinations, not full blown ones like this, in so long. He thought he was doing better, he thought he was finally on the way to being normal, but apparently not. Apparently, he’s… he doesn’t even have a word for it. Something akin to broken, devastated, ruined. His mind never gives him a break.

Winston’s head cocks to the side, watching as Will removes his hands from his unkempt hair and then rubs them down the opposite arm, and Will looks at his dog and sighs. He can feel a cold sweat on his neck, hands trembling, and now he’s really starting to worry about his sense of reality. He knows Winston is real, he knows he’s in Louisiana, in a motel, he has a wife named Molly and an adopted son named Wally, he has a mental illness, and autism. Hannibal Lecter is dead, he killed him in a botched murder-suicide.

“*Will*.”

“God I need to be admitted somewhere.” He laughs, eyes heavy, and then he presses the heels of both his hands against his soft eyelids until he sees stars and spiraling color. “I need a brain scan.”

Hannibal touches his shoulder and the buzzing continues but that, he reasons, is from the continuous damage to that shoulder. “I’m just as shocked as you are, please sit back down. You’re upsetting your dog.”

His hand slides down his arm, the tingling stops just above his elbow. Winston is stressed, Hannibal or this hallucination is right. He’s standing on the bed, hair sticking up, eyes focused on Will and his current breakdown. He’s going to start barking soon if Will doesn’t collect himself.

The tingling moves farther then, to his wrist. He glances down and sees that Hannibal’s hand is wrapped around it, but he’s under the impression that he could slip his wrist out of his grip

with ease. It isn't so tangible, so solid. It's more like the impression of touch, and that feels more hallucination than anything.

It's nerve damage. It has to be. He knows it is sometimes. That he's been so fucked over in that shoulder that it's destroyed and he can feel the buzzing all the way down to his fingers some days and this, this has to be that. He's feeling it and he's finally had a mental break and he's pretending it's Hannibal to make himself feel better for what he did. So much for coping. So much for going back and being the husband and father he always wanted to be.

Hannibal lets him go, and Will walks back to the bed, slowly dropping himself down. Now his shoulder does hurt, and his elbow, and his fingers. He shakes his hand like it might stop the pain and then reaches for his bag to take out two tylenol and swallow them dry.

He sits on the edge of it, his blanket soft under his thighs, and he places his elbows on his knees, face in his hands as he tries to get himself together. There's a very real possibility he's going to start crying again, he can feel his throat thickening and his chest stuttering already.

Helpless, but he's always been this way.

"You look so real." Small, his voice quivers and quakes and he wants this to be real, so badly. He'd give anything for Hannibal to be here with him. "I thought I forgot what you sounded like."

Hannibal sighs, but it doesn't sound like he even took a breath. It's less air and more noise. The heater in the room clicks one "I am real. Your mind hasn't decided to play tricks on you again, even if you may wish it." He doesn't touch Will again, but he finally moves into the moonlight. "This is as startling for you as it was for me, but you'll come to see the reality of it soon. I promise."

Distantly he can remember Alana saying Hannibal always keeps his promises. Before he was home from the hospital, and he wasn't exactly all right in the head, she said she was happy he was dead because he promised to kill her. Or, he thinks she said that. He isn't sure, but if she did, it might be affecting this hallucination and his mouth fills with warm saliva again.

Blinking back more tears, he attempts to clear his throat. How many small things he hardly remembers will influence this? Or is it real? He certainly looks real, more real and less bloody than his usual hallucinations, but maybe his mind has just gotten that good, and he hasn't even looked him in the face yet. Just vaguely around him.

"No, no, you're not." His voice trembles in his rush to say what he thinks will ground him in reality. "I'm hallucinating. You're just saying what I want to hear. I'm influenced and I can't," he starts tapping his temple, "I can't think right now."

"Winston knows I'm here." Hannibal nods once toward the dog. "How often have your hallucinations ever shown you things you truly wish to see? How often have they sparked a reaction from any of your pack?"

Will looks down at Winston who's calmed down considerably since Will came back to the bed. At the very least, he's looking in Hannibal's direction, tongue out, tail wagging, moving

from paw to paw like he might get a treat if he behaves. He'd always do that when Hannibal came to the house, snuffling his pockets for sausage, and Hannibal usually supplied.

That doesn't comfort Will, even though he wishes it did.

His hands move, rubbing across his face again, and he has to stop himself from gripping his hair with full force. Instead, he sits up, rolling his shoulders in the process, and rubs his hands together to keep them occupied. If he's hallucinating, he knows he'll wake up in the morning and this will all be gone, or it won't be and he's finally snapped.

Or Hannibal is really there.

He's sweating, maybe he has a fever or maybe he's having an anxiety attack, but he can't be sure of either right now. He feels close to having another meltdown, the third one today and it'll be the kind he hasn't had since he was a teenager and lived in his father's house. The kind that'll make him go nonverbal for days when it happens.

Will tries to take a few calming breaths to center himself again. This never worked before, and honestly, he suspects it won't work now, but he wants to try in the off chance it will.

He fills his lungs until they burn and then slowly releases the air. His fingers are between his teeth, biting the skin around the nails until copper blooms against his tongue.

"I don't understand." That's true, that's something he knows is right. He's confused and cold and sweating despite his shivering. The back of his tongue tastes like bile and all he can smell is sulfur which makes him gag a little.

Hannibal rests both his hands on Will's shoulders, and somehow, this tingling feels like a comfort. While that doesn't make sense, it does cause him to slump down. He'll take it, even if it makes no sense. "You've had an eventful day, you seemed upset earlier, at the church. Perhaps you should rest and we can talk in the morning, yes?"

Will looks at him quickly, not enough to really take in his face but enough that he'll know he's being acknowledged. He's scared if he looks up, it won't be Hannibal looking back; Garret Jacob Hobbs or Francis Dolarhyde or Randall Tier, even. So, he glances up and then back down at the balding carpet. Quietly, he agrees.

"Good." Hannibal lets go of him and moves away, far enough back that he doesn't feel imposed upon.

Will lays back down, voice distant, wetness clinging to his eyelashes. "Yeah, good."

It takes him longer than it should to fall asleep, even with Winston curled into his side. The feeling of eyes on him makes him want to pull the blanket up over his head and hide. Maybe even crawl out of his skin, leaving it a husk. All of this feels too much like an empty tomb, a resurrection of his mind.

At some point Winston lays his head on Will's chest, a pressure he needs, and he's finally able to go under.

Somehow, he sleeps worse than he has in months. His entire body aches from a combination of the mattress and the nerve damage, and he dreams about that night over and over until he can taste the ocean and he feels so incredibly insane. Each dream ends the same, with his lips against Hannibal's cold ones. There's this overarching sense of dread that plagues him as he stumbles through the dark expanses of his dream, of the memory. Each time he knows Hannibal will die and each time he can't stop himself from pushing them off that cliff.

When he awakens the next morning, feeling hardly better than the night before, Hannibal is sitting in the chair across the room, he can see him out of his peripheral vision as he tries to bring himself back to the problem at hand.

Will stares at him for a long time in the artificial darkness before he rolls over and turns the lamp on. He knows the sun is out, he knows it would be better, but he's not quite willing to peel himself from the perceived safety of the bed.

Hannibal looks over at him, and if Will could look at him without wanting to vomit, he'd see a sadness there. Expertly masked, but his lips are tightened and his hands are intertwined a bit too tightly.

After years of seeing things, a stent in the BSHCI, and his bout with encephalitis, he's gotten better at seeing the made up. At finding where the fabrications of his mind begin and end, but as he stares at Hannibal, or around him, he can't find the dullness of it. There's nothing there that immediately sets off the alarm bells – except that he's here at all.

Deliberately, he stretches and reaches for his bag where his tylenol is. He's going to pop two pills again and see what that does for him but the sickening feeling that this isn't going to go away has already started to settle over him like a plague.

Hannibal nods to him, voice terribly steady. "Good morning, Will."

"Fuck," he falls back and rolls to his stomach, shoving his face into the stiff motel pillow, "should I be medicated?"

Hannibal smiles at that, Will hears it more than he sees it, and the edge of the bed dips just slightly. "The sort of medication you wish to use wouldn't work on you, not for your desired outcome. I would still be here, you've broken the barrier that separated us."

Will doesn't move to look at him again. He couldn't even hear his shoes against the floor before he sat down, but he feels the temperature around him drop and he doesn't want to give him access to his soft underbelly, he knows how well that was last time. Alternatively, he lets him have the delicate skin of his neck, the arteries and veins of his thighs and calves that could easily kill him if cut.

He mumbles into the pillow and then turns his face slightly so Hannibal can hear him. "No one would believe me. They'd think I was certifiable–they already do."

Hannibal's voice is light, as if he's reminiscing. "That's been a constant struggle for you, hasn't it? But, you've continuously been correct. Clever boy."

Finally Will pushes himself up, resting the weight of his upper body on his forearms. He's annoyed by his teasing, he can't even escape it in what might be a hallucination. "You understand that this is insane? What people would say if I ran around saying Hannibal Lecter haunts me–god, Freddie Lounds would have a field day. She'd tell people I was fucking a ghost."

"You've said it enough for me to thoroughly grasp the idea. Perhaps at this moment, you feel as if you're living within a phantasmagoria, but I assure you that this is real." Hannibal crosses his legs, observing Will like he has been the entire time they've known each other. His lip twitches upward, much more amused than he was last night. "Insanity is merely what you make of it, Will. You know that just as well as I do."

Will takes a breath. If this is a hallucination, it's not going away, and frankly, he doesn't want it to. Horribly, he loves the idea of having Hannibal with him, in whatever way he can. Now that he's slept and the original shock of it all has disappeared, he thinks it might be nice to have this, whether he's all in his head or not. It also would help explain why all of these things have happened to him, if he's really haunting him.

He won't be medicated, or admitted. Doesn't matter if he should be, or if it might work, he won't. He'll deal with it the way he has dealt with everything else, on his own with a bottle of tylenol, or advil. He saw Abigail for months, and he reasons with himself, how is this different?

Flipping back over, Will sits up and pets one hand through Winston's fur. He chews the inside of his lip for a moment before nodding. "Okay."

This response shocks Hannibal in a way it shouldn't. "Okay?"

"Either I'm insane or you're real but either way it's–" he swallows, "either way you're here. I slept on it, if you're real then that's great and if you're something my mind created, well, I've never had a strong tie to reality anyway."

Tears blur his vision again and he has to scrub them away before he goes into a crying fit again. All that dreaming just reminded him of one thing, and it's like he loves him, and that he deserves him. Fuck everything else.

Hannibal accepts this easily, but Will figures if he is a ghost, he's been waiting on this moment for quite some time. Those words were probably much more of a relief than Will may ever know.

"You were once very in tune with your reality, briefly." Hannibal glances at Will and then down to Winston. "I was your paddle."

"You were the hole in my boat." Will scratches behind his dog's ear, watching the fur move with each bend of his fingers, "and I sat in it, content as I sank."

Hannibal rubs his hand over Winston's back and the dog shivers, turning to look at him and then moving closer to Will for his warmth.

They both laugh at that, and it feels normal for the smallest of moments.

After that, they sit in an oppressive silence. There's a lot to talk about and neither of them is exactly sure how to go about it, especially Will who still can't decide if this is reality or not. If it isn't, he can be as cruel as he wants, if it's reality, he doesn't want to push Hannibal away again. Not that it matters, he can't be cruel either way. He's missed him too dearly, and had to accept that this is love, just as much as it is hate, and has been love for quite some time. Maybe that's why his brain has concocted this.

Part of him still wants to curse him for all he's ever done, and maybe there will be a time for it, but it isn't now. He can't live without him, this separation was killing him. It was making him nearly suicidal every day he woke up without him. The only reason he hasn't done it is because Molly would have to find him, or identify his body, and he doesn't want her burying a second husband.

Eventually, Will has to get up and let Winston out and feed him. It's quick, and he's half expecting Hannibal to be gone when he comes back in but instead, he's sitting on the bed, back against the headboard like he's meant to be there.

Will showers then, without so much as a word. Scrubbing at his scalp and face. He doesn't feel sick, or strange, or mentally disturbed. Not more than usual. There's no fever that he can tell, his eyes aren't warm, and his head isn't pounding. This is just his life. Strange things happen to him, and stranger things will.

The water scorches his skin until he's red and blotchy and his shoulder has finally given him a reprieve. He lets it run over him for a few more minutes before he gets out.

"You can't touch me." He infers as soon as he comes out of the bathroom, clothed, but hair drip drying and wetting his shirt.

Hannibal looks at him and offers him a bitter smile. He's petting Winston who seems to have adjusted to the coolness of his touch. He nods down toward him. "You're the only creature I can't touch in a meaningful way."

"Oh," he shrugs one shoulder like that statement isn't of consequence, like it doesn't seem like some sort of punishment for the both of them, "but you can move stuff."

"Yes, I have been for a while now." He holds up his hand and Will's truck keys jingle. "Your keys, for example, are easy enough. Larger items require me to take energy from a power source. A strange occurrence, actually."

"My phone." Will almost questions, but of course that's why his battery is constantly drained. He nods towards the nightstand and Hannibal complies and puts them down.

He licks his lips and turns to brush his teeth. "Am I the only person who can see you then?"

"The dogs can, your… son is young enough to catch glimpses, maybe more but I'm uncertain. He's never interacted with me if he has." He says this as nonchalantly as Hannibal

says anything. “Most adults don’t want to see, it would take some convincing, so they won’t unless severely pressed. You, I suspect, have seen the dead often throughout your life.”

Will spits and laughs. “I have an overactive imagination.”

“Occasionally, but not now.” Hannibal smiles as Will returns to sit by him in the bed. “You’ve always seen me, even when you did not want to.”

They’re side by side, but they feel miles apart. If Will could, he’d brush his shoulder against Hannibal’s, maybe touch his hand. There’s more fear, though, specifically about how tangible Hannibal really is and if he’ll go straight through him if Will is the one initiating the touch.

Will never really did believe in ghosts as a kid, which makes sense given what he remembered last night. He supposes he never disparaged people who did, the world is a strange place, but even this is a stretch for him. Accepting this, regardless of what it is, is a stretch.

“You’ve been trying to get me to see you for months.” Will reasons, even if he hardly believes it as the words pass over his tongue and teeth. “I needed to get away to see you this time.”

He needed to remember what happened from before. His roots.

“It seems that even in death, it’s the only thing I desire,” Hannibal mutters as if displeased with this information.

Will tilts his head and scratches behind Winston’s ear as Hannibal smooths his fur across his back down. It’s a strange thing to share, being able to touch the same thing but not each other. A divine tragedy.

When it goes silent again Will looks at Hannibal, or tries. He’s still disturbed by the idea that the person who looks back at him might not be him. “I was supposed to go fishing.”

Hannibal shifts and the blankets move. Not enough to matter unless someone is really looking; he is. “You’re more than welcome to go.”

Will shakes his head, pressing one of his palms against his eye again. “I’m not sure I could stomach it right now.”

“Your entire perception of what you’ve always known to be true has been pulled from under you, it’s only natural you should react skittishly.” Hannibal whispers. “An afterlife wasn’t in the cards for you.”

Will leans his head back against the headboard and stares at the ceiling. His eyes swim, and he breathes in. The room doesn’t smell like Hannibal. It smells like Winston and his deodorant. “I don’t think I'd consider what you’re… experiencing as an afterlife.”

“Why not? I’m alive, simply in another plane of existence.” Hannibal counters gently. “Dead to you, but very much alive.”

“You’re taking it surprisingly well.” Will turns to look at him again. To finally see with eyes unclouded. Swallowing down his reservations, he takes in his profile first. He needs to look at him, he needs to know what he is, who he is, and this is the easiest way.

“Hey,” Will whispers like one might to a lover, “look at me?”

Hannibal follows Will’s instruction and turns to him hesitantly.

Staring at him in the eyes, he looks for a flaw. He isn’t see through, or terrifyingly pale, or gaunt, but his eyes are glazed over and his lips are tinged blue. There’s no blood on him, his hair is styled, and he’s dressed in a deep red, velvet looking suit, something he’s never seen him in. Not even in his Memory Palace.

“I’ve had time to accept it,” Hannibal answers him once Will has looked his fill. “Many months while you ignored me.”

That makes sense to Will. It also makes sense why it took him so long to get around to being the full blown terror he’s always been.

Of everything, knowing he has to take time to accept it is comforting. It makes Will smile. “Oh yeah? Were you freaked out at first?”

“Confused, we were falling and then I was in the hospital with you. I tried to wake you up in my own hysteria.” The inflection of his voice makes Will move, eyes scanning over his face again.

He’s lying about something. He can always tell when he is, but Will doesn’t know what or why. What’s there to even lie about? No one else can see him, can hear him. He’s always wanted to know everything and vice versa and now they’ve crossed this bridge and it’s too much for him. Hannibal has to keep secrets again, but to what end?

No need to fight about it, though, if Hannibal is here and real, there will be plenty of time to hash it out. He can’t lie forever, he enjoys terrorizing Will too much. “How long did it take?”

Hannibal chuckles at that. “I’ve yet to fully accept it. It’s more bearable now that you see me.”

Realization dawns on Will, and he stops scratching Winston. “You aren’t alone.”

“Yes,” Hannibal smiles fondly, “I’m with you.”

That’s what it was always about, he knows that, but he’d never thought about it really. They were alone together, but Hannibal just wanted to be together. This is it, he’s finally gotten what he’s always wanted, even if Will had to make him up for him to have it.

He rubs his eyes again and lets that linger between them. Hannibal was always alone, his whole life. So was Will, and they were both too volatile and destructive to know what to do about it. Then, for a few hours, they had each other and now they do again. He’s given Hannibal everything he’s ever wanted.

Rubbing his hands together, he tries to speak without his voice cracking. “I’m sorry for pushing us off the cliff.” He’s wanted to say that for so long. “I can’t make sense of it now.”

Hannibal touches his shoulder and the tingling returns and Will thinks maybe he doesn’t hate it like he did before. He thinks of when he was sick at the idea of god and those women from Wally’s church and his entire body was thrumming–that must have been Hannibal. He wishes it was a cold hand instead, but he’ll take whatever he can get.

“I forgave you before we hit the water, Will.” His forgiveness is somehow both comforting and revolting, but Hannibal’s softened in the last few hours, and Will can’t help but feel warm despite the cold air.

Everything feels too much and not enough and he decides that he’ll believe Hannibal’s here, even if it doesn’t make sense, even if it is some fucked up hallucination. He’ll believe it’s him because it’s better than thinking about being in an oblivion Will can’t reach and it’s better than trying to come to terms with his mind creating him. He’s here, that’s that.

His chest stutters but he manages to control his voice as he speaks. “I wouldn’t have done it if I knew we’d be separated like this.”

Hannibal closes his eyes and nods. “I know, Will.”

Time trickles on throughout the day. They talk about inconsequential things that mostly revolve around Hannibal as he seems to know most of everything Will has done or gone through. He berates him on his table manners and the fact that he doesn’t ever do the laundry, which for some reason, he finds to be some grievance and when Will says Hannibal doesn’t even like Molly, he tuts and tells him that he can still be tidy and do his share.

There’s this feeling that he’s holding back, this sort of horribleness that only can be distinguished with Will’s empathy but even that seems to struggle. He’s never had to understand the emotional reasonings of a ghost before, but it upsets him that he can’t pin down what he’s decidedly keeping from him.

Whatever it is, he really isn’t in the mood to fight it out, not now at least. He just wants to know things and have Hannibal know things. To get answers and to decide if he likes them.

“I don’t know what to do now,” Will tells him. They’re both laid on their backs with Winston between them. “It feels wrong.”

Hannibal pauses his petting and turns his head on the pillow. “What do you mean?”

He closes his eyes and thinks about his house in Wolf Trap. He has it still, Molly just doesn’t know. She’d be livid if she did, he imagines the sort of blowout fight that would have, and there are ashes at her house. Ashes of a serial killer who very much wanted her dead, and she doesn’t know that either.

There’s been a lot of wrong in their relationship, especially on Will’s side of it. He’s never trusted, or loved, or accepted fully. Molly is still in love with her deceased husband, and Will doesn’t fault her for that. If anything he gets it now. She married him because he looked like

her husband, and he married her because she was reliable and because sometimes, in the right light, she resembled Hannibal.

He loves her, she loves him, just not in the right way.

“I have to go home to Molly, but how can I?” He shakes his head, hair clinging to the pillow. “How does that work? You’re here and she’s there and it feels like I’m committing a crime if I lay in her bed again.”

Against both of them, but he leaves that out.

“This is your life, Will, you have to do what’s right for you,” Hannibal says matter-of-factly.

While that’s true, his life is hurting people. It’s killed people. It’s ripping them open and destroying them. It traumatized a little boy and permanently damaged his wife. He wants to be selfish, and he wants to let Molly go find someone who can be what she needs them to be. Both, he guesses, can exist at the same time.

“Enlightened in death?” Will chuckles.

Brittle as he is, he looks away and responds. “I can hardly force you to make a decision now.”

“No, but you have one you want me to make.” Will’s breathy when he says it, he hates the idea but he likes it in the same way. “Right?”

“Yes, and I believe it’s one you attempted to make for both of us on that cliff.” And he’s right. Will is always right, and Hannibal tends to be right about him too.

This is revelations, this is the four horsemen of the apocalypse coming down on him and his entire life. It is what it is, but it’s destructive and cruel and it’s going to take victims. Not just emotionally, either.

He stares at the dingy ceiling, chewing on his already busted lip until he tastes his blood again. Hannibal could be real, but he also could be a well concocted hallucination of his crumbling mind. Either way, he can’t have both.

“Can I ask you something?” Somehow this is what he thinks should be the defining question of what to do. It’s crude, and Hannibal might find it distasteful, but he doesn’t care. “It might be uncomfortable.”

Hannibal side eyes him before nodding. “Anything.”

His chest rises and falls, and he looks at Hannibal and realizes that his does not. Parting his lip to speak, he turns to lie on his side. His voice is low when it comes out, graveled, and much more intrigued than he means to give off. “Did you watch me and Molly have sex?”

Hannibal looks over his face like he’s trying to find something there. He wonders if he does because his eyes crinkle as he smiles. Devilish, like he’s had this secret and has been waiting to whisper it in Will’s ear.

“No,” he narrows his eyes, and there are more words on his tongue. “But I did watch you masturbate.”

His stomach flips and his entire body feels warm again. Will looks back at the ceiling and gives one slow nod, hand back in Winston’s fur. “Okay.”

Chapter 8

Through the window, he can see his wife and child. He can't exactly tell what they're doing, but he can see them talking, he can see Molly put her hand on his shoulder to try and comfort him and he wonders, for a split second, if he was really about to do this. Is he going to tell her he wants a divorce? Or is he going to tell her the whole truth? He doubts that very much, but she deserves to know some semblance of it. Enough to make her hate him, anyway, and Will is antsy in a bad way.

He's running around in circles, trying to find ways that this isn't completely selfish on his part. There's a few reasons why it isn't, like Wally who's being forced to see Will as a father figure despite being frightened of him and the fact their whole relationship is continuously building on a stack of unsteady lies and also how he knows that Molly is increasingly distressed by Will's paranoid and jumpy behavior. Those reasons aren't selfish, and they're honest, but he can't get over the fact that he truly isn't doing this for them or for any of those reasons. He cares about them, he wants them both well taken care of and to never be placed in harm's way again, but this is for him.

He scrubs his hand over his face and walks across Molly's yard and unlocks the front door with the key he's taken off his key ring to leave on the counter. He glances over his shoulder at his truck, still running, letting the key sit there for a few seconds while he debates. Winston's in the driver's side with his head out the window, and Hannibal's there. He can still see him in his velvet suit and his glazed over eyes.

A part of him will never be satiated by this life, he knows that. He knew it when he asked Molly to marry him, and now? Will has been living in his grief so long, thinking he'd see Hannibal again, and now that he has, he's reminded of what it was like to kill Dolarhyde. How that felt, how he's been too miserable to think about it.

There is nothing he wants more than to have Hannibal, in whichever way he can have him, and to feel the warm burst of blood against him, baptizing him once more. His mind is made up, he just needs to swallow down everything else.

Molly startles as Will walks in, but laughs, placing her hand over her heart when she sees him. "God, Will, you scared me."

He stands there for a moment, unsure of what to do, of where to put his hands. He drops the key on the counter with a resounding clink, and all at once, everything comes tumbling down around the three of them. Wally stands from the table, almost like on instinct, but too much like he rehearsed it, Molly looks at him, touching Wally's shoulders to guide him gently from the kitchen and toward his bedroom, and Will haunts their doorway.

He rubs his sweaty hands against his pants, swallowing down burning bile. "We need to talk."

The words are too loud and they all flinch at it. It isn't a yell, but it's louder than Will's talked in months, and they all know it's bad. They all know what this is about to lead to.

“Wally, go to your room.” Molly directs easily but with the kind of seriousness that her son doesn’t even interject. Wally zips off by himself and when he’s in the bedroom, door shut, possibly even locked, Molly gives him a gentle look. “Will, honey, what’s happened?”

Foolishly, he reaches for a necklace he doesn’t wear anymore. Trying to find the crucifix, the little man pinned against it that was meant to protect him–there was no protection here, only the half truths, a marriage bound to fail, and the dead.

They both know what this is, what it was always going to be. Equally as ready to tuck their tails or fight it out, Will knows at this moment that he’s going to be more honest with her than he originally planned to be and that the only way he’s walking out of this house is if she fully hates him. That shouldn’t be too hard, but it will hurt.

He takes a breath, centering himself. His hands are still clammy and he hasn’t been able to fully look at her, but he starts up the speech he prepared on the drive and rehearsed over and over again until Hannibal asked him, ever polite, to stop. “Molly, I can’t do this. Not to you, not to Wally. You need someone stable and that’s not me. It hasn’t ever been me.”

She also takes a breath, and nods considerably, but not in the kind of way that tells him she understands. That isn’t what this is about, she, for all the good that she is, can never understand him. That isn’t her fault, but it is one of the biggest faults in their marriage.

The tone her voice takes is both deeply sympathetic and not at all surprised. “Will, mental illness isn’t something to be ashamed of.”

This doesn’t shock him, not in the slightest. Molly, for as long as he’s known her, has been very delicate about Will’s mental state. He was up front and honest that he had some issues (not that he ever gave her specifics), and this was never a problem for her. She is an exceptional woman, doing her best, and often offered him the sort of support he had never had before which makes this all the more painful.

For the first time, he has to be honest with himself and admit to himself that he used her. She used him too, he had some very striking features that resembled her late husband, and she was lonely with a young son to raise, but honestly, his betrayal is worse. She married him and loved him, even if some of it was because he reminded her of her husband. He married her and cared for her because he wanted to know he wasn’t as disturbed as many believed – and look where that has gotten the both of them.

Will takes calm steps through the house, heading for their bedroom so he can pack what few personals he has afforded himself. He doesn’t make this a big display, he doesn’t want to frighten her more than she is and he knows that she’s unsettled by her altercation with the Dragon. That’s why she craved so desperately for Will to just be okay, to stop looking at the signs, to either ignore it and accept he was unwell. He can’t blame her for wanting that, it’s his fault in the first place for getting her involved.

Will opens his dresser first, slowly, like he’s just observing the clothes. “You don’t understand, and I can’t expect you to. You’re a good woman and being with me is going to do nothing but drag you down.”

“I don’t understand what you went through, I can’t, but I know that things have been hard for me too, and I know that I love you, Will.” She argues, and he knows that she does. “We can figure this out together. We can get you help, there’s new treatments and medicines, and some of it isn’t even just medicine. Holistic care, you know?”

He falters, considering her words. What if what he’s seeing is just a hallucination based on his grief and mental illness? His empathy disorder twisting up inside his head and creating what he wishes was real, and one day he’d wake up and it would be gone and he’d be alone.

Will shakes his head; he already decided that doesn’t matter. He’ll live in the delusion because it’s better than living so disturbingly depressed that getting out of bed feels like a chore. He’s tired of rotting, of feeling like he’s decomposing under the pressure of accepting what happened and how killing Hannibal is his fault.

Before, he thought it was all he wanted, to rip him apart with his hands and watch him bleed. Now, because of everything, *despite* everything, he just wants Hannibal. Killing him solved nothing, it didn’t feel good and warm and vindicated like he thought it would. It was cold and damp, and he had nailed in his own coffin.

“I haven’t been honest with you, and you don’t want me to be. We both know it, we’ve lived in this lie and it’s not good for either of us.” He looks at her, and the state of her deflates him. “You know what was said about me before.”

“I’ve never believed it.” She shakes her head, hands shaking as she watches him pack up his life, “you told me not to.”

“Maybe you should have.” He moves a little faster, shoving things into the bag, not caring about orderliness, so long as he can get out of the house as quickly as possible. “I lied about some of it, I’m not proud of that.”

“We can talk about this, is it because you’re bisexual, Will that isn’t a problem for me. I’m sorry if I ever made you feel that way.” She’s so sincere about it too, and it strikes him. He remembers she mentioned the little name Freddie Lounds called him and Hannibal and he denied it so adamantly that it became less about the idea they were pack hunting–which he also denied–and more about him not being interested in men. “I know how difficult it must have been for you, you told me how your father was, and to be manipulated like that by someone you trusted, I understand why you didn’t tell me. I don’t hold that against you, it’s yours to tell people.”

Will has walked to the closet and he holds one of his shirts for a moment. He did lie about that, didn’t he? At the time it felt like his denial of that title, Murder Husbands, and the idea he might be bisexual were all wrapped in one, but that isn’t true. It was just easier to pretend it was.

If he is honest with himself, he knows he’s been denying that for much longer than he’s known Hannibal. His father seemingly knew from the time he was a young boy, and was very forceful with his feelings towards the idea. So, he easily concealed it, shoving it way down until it didn’t cross his mind anymore.

He's a killer though, and he doesn't believe in god, and in the off chance there's some afterlife that isn't just having your consciousness stuck on earth and he burns, he's certain it won't be for being attracted to men as well.

Suddenly, he feels the fabrics of his shirt catch on his hand, realizing he's been standing at the closet so long that the entire house has gone quiet, he snatches the shirt off the hanger and shoves it into the bag. "That's not the issue, Molly, it's everything else. I've lied about it all. About my time in the FBI, about the house in Wolf Trap–"

She blinks, and her mouth screws up and if he could see her, if he wasn't so enveloped in his despair and issues, he'd know her emotions have completely shifted. "What about the house in Wolf Trap?"

Will purses his lips, turning to observe her for a moment, and then shoves the last few items in his near overflowing bag. "I'm taking Winston."

Molly's staring at him but not seeing, her eyes are too blurry from the righteous tears, and Will can feel the confusion and desperation radiating off of her. It could easily overtake him if he let it, but he won't. This is for everyone's own good.

Grabbing his arm, she forces him to look at her. "What about the house in Wolf Trap, Will?"

"I never sold it. I've been keeping it just in case," He admits this and doesn't find himself nearly as distraught as he expected he would be telling her. He's upset for her, but not for himself.

Mouth agape, shaking from anger that she's trying to swallow down, she lets his shirt go and steps away. Will finds it hard to look at her, afraid of what he might see in her eyes. He might not feel guilty for not selling the house, but he does for what he's done to her life.

"You promised me that you would sell it. You said you put the money in a savings account," her words are icy as she wipes her tears from her eyes.

"Yeah well, I didn't." He means to sound cruel, but it comes off more dejected. "I promised a lot of things and they weren't right for me to. I'm sorry, you don't deserve this, I know that."

"Do you know that, really?" She demands, "you can't drop a bomb like that and expect me to roll over and take it. Why didn't you sell the house?"

"In case this didn't work, in case I realized I couldn't fill the part – I can't, Molly. You deserve someone better. You're a good woman, your son's a good boy, y'all deserve someone who can love you right." He shakes his head, tongue heavy, he corrects himself. "You both deserve someone who can give you what you need."

He passes her and grabs the box she left on his dresser. It's heavy, and it's addressed to him, he expects someone probably hand delivered it, but he doesn't ask. Walking into the kitchen, he grabs the one mug he brought from the house in Wolf Trap, and then makes his way directly to the door.

Molly follows behind him, the anger and grief radiating off her is immeasurable. It's enough to drown him if he lets it, and a cold sweat breaks out over his neck. For one second he'd like to turn his brain off, to just walk out of this house that never really felt like home and move on.

"Where do you get the nerve?" She says before he can open the door and make a break for it. "We made vows, Will. Remember those? I have supported you through everything, I knew you'd be different when you came back, I accepted that, but this? This is low."

His tongue juts out and wets his lips before he looks back at her. "I know, I'm sorry."

A weak apology, but he doesn't know what more he can say. Nothing's going to make this better, but regardless, he wishes he could minimize the damage.

They look at each other, horrible mirrors of a life neither of them can have. Offhandedly, he thinks that if he never knew Hannibal, if he didn't know what it feels like to be seen, they could have been perfectly happy and in love with each other. That isn't their reality though.

Her eyes flicker down to the box in his hands, her voice coming out strangled by disbelief. "What's in the box, Will?"

Will hesitates for what feels like the millionth time today and finds himself unable to resist her command, feeling as if she is owed at least this bit of clarity. "His… his ashes."

The color drains from her face. "Who's ashes?"

His tongue tastes like cemetery leaves and holy water. It takes everything in him not to look away. "I think you already know, Molls."

She scans his face one last time, trying to make sure she heard him right, that this is something that's actually happening to her, and then she does this thing with her lip, twisted and upward and altogether hateful. "Get the fuck out of my house."

He opens the door, pauses, and then steps out into the warm air. "I'll file for the divorce this week."

Never in his life has he crossed a yard so fast, ready to be gone and out of here. His hand goes to touch that cross again and he sighs when he finds his neck bare.

Quickly, he throws his bag into the floor of the truck, places the box in the middle seat, and then goes to the shed to grab his tool box, the rest of his fishing gear, and whatever other little things he has. The faster the better, if he leaves anything, Molly can sell it or burn it or whatever else she wants to do.

It takes a total of two trips to get everything and by the end of it, he's got it all strapped down in the bed of the truck and he slides into the driver's side. Winston has moved to sit in the middle, and Hannibal is petting his fur down.

Will slams the truck door, taking in mouthfuls of air like he might have an anxiety attack. He can't lie and say his eyes aren't stinging with unshed tears, this is a chapter of his life he's

closing, and he does still care for them, but he knows he's done the right thing. For himself, for them, for Hannibal. This is what he had to do, and he doesn't care if one day he wakes up to regret it.

Hannibal watches him carefully. He's upset, visibly, knuckles bleached from how tightly he's holding the steering wheel, and he feels like he could snap it if he wanted to. God, does he want to. Instead, he puts it in drive and takes them down the long road from the house.

When they turn onto the main road Hannibal clears his throat, but they both know it's only for the performance of it. "How was that?"

Will rolls his eyes, sniffling but more okay than he should be. He doubts Hannibal truly cares, but he doesn't mind him pretending to for his sake. "The divorce will hopefully be clean. I won't be surprised if I hear from Alana or Jack soon, though."

Hannibal nods, continuing his affection for Winston.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> sorry i didn't write for a while. i went mildly insane and couldn't consider writing anything with plot

His second coming to Wolf Trap is wildly uneventful. His old furniture is still here, covered in sheets, frozen in time waiting on his return. Everything of his old life sits there, just as it was the day Hannibal was taken into FBI custody. A memorium for a life Will wanted and could never have.

The first week involved a leak, the first floor ceiling had a nice water ring that he had to bleach out and then he had to scrounge around to find and fix the problem. He had to clean, everything was coated in a layer of dust he wasn't expecting, and when it was all squared away, it very nearly looked like he never left. The only thing missing is a sizable pack.

Now everything has mostly returned to normal. Or, pre-marriage normal. He's comfortable here, more comfortable than he ever was in Molly's cabin. It's the only place that's ever really felt like home, and now he doesn't have to worry about it being ruined by serial killers or FBI agents or nosy press.

What is different is Hannibal. He haunts the house much like he haunts Will, with enthusiasm. Unwilling to let any part of it go unexplored.

He's stuck here, he guesses. He's not completely clear on the details but from what he's gathered, Hannibal is here and will remain here for some time or forever. He doesn't know, he doesn't want to know.

If he's here forever, then that means he's stuck with Hannibal until he dies and if he'll eventually leave it means he doesn't have forever with Hannibal. It's a worrisome loop of which one is worse and for the past two weeks, the idea of being separated from him is worse. He should know that by now, after months of his rotting, he assumed he'd leave and fall into a peaceful life with the creature haunting him, but he can't. Not exactly.

There's still the possibility that this isn't real at all. That Will made him up in his head to cope with the loss of a death with him–a future with him. That maybe one day he'll wake up and he'll be gone, but not in a crossed to the other side kind of way, but in a hallucination that's finally broken kind of way. He'll wake up sick and cold and terribly alone and he'll die in this house and there will be nothing by black, cold emptiness that greets him. Denied entry even into the lake of fire.

He tries not to think about that though. He doesn't have hallucinations anymore, his mental state hasn't deteriorated that badly (If it did, he thinks he'd start having religious paranoia). All of this can be explained easily. Hannibal is just… he's just attached to him. That's all. For whatever reason, like his mom was.

"This isn't dinner, Will," Hannibal says, his voice low in his ear.

It shocks Will out of his thoughts and pushes him away from the clockwork murder that makes up his mind. It forces him to take in lungs full of air, as he shoots him with a haphazardous glare. His body resets, the coolness Hannibal brings when he's this close always forces him to shiver, goosebumps up his arms and the back of his neck until the hairs stand.

It doesn't help that Hannibal knows what he's doing. He enjoys this, the thoughts that torment Will, how he goes from cold to hot in a matter of seconds, how easy it is to get him riled up. He's always liked it, to see what makes Will tick and how far he can push, but this seems different somehow. A bit more intense, if anything, but nothing Will can't handle.

He's frying up some bologna to make a sandwich and he's already pulled out the bag of doritos to crush between his two slices of white bread. This and ramen have been his staples and a pack of pepperoni he eats like a snack. The idea of going to the store feels too monumental a task, and he bought all of this at one of those big gas stations off the interstate when he moved back.

If someone notices him, if they ask if he's that guy, if he knew Hannibal Lecter, well Will thinks he'll be struck down and sucked up by the earth like the ocean took Hannibal.

Will clears his throat, swallowing his spit to try and make the words come out stern, anything but the crackling that is just beneath the surface. "It is, actually. My dad used to make this for me."

"Perhaps that's why you're so slight, a lack of good nutrition." Hannibal's eyes narrow as he glances down at the pan. Every day he complains about Will's cooking, about his lack thereof. "This may not have any nutritional value, which you could use. If you went to the store, perhaps I could walk you through some easier recipes."

"It has protein," Will scoffs lightly, using his fork to flip the pieces of mystery meat. "Besides, I haven't been here in a long time. I want to get settled before I make a public outing aside from what I already have to do."

He just needs a little more time to pass. He needs to be completely forgotten. Just another face in the crowd, a relic, alone like he preferred it before Jack Crawford took him out of his classroom and made him infamous.

"Bologna can hardly be considered protein," Hannibal says, trying to get him to see reason. Whatever reason there is. "This rest is–"

"It's *fine*, Hannibal." Will takes a piece off the pan and tosses it to Winston who catches it mid air. "See, Winston likes it. You're the only one with a problem."

Hannibal's blue tinged upper lip goes up, a snarl that means nothing. Nothing. What is he going to do to him that he already hasn't done? What can he do? He can't even touch him for Christ's sake.

He clicks the stove off, careful of it, and works on his sandwich. He adds a thin layer of mayo to each piece of bread, a piece of wilting lettuce that very well should not have been sold in any establishment but a grocery store or farmer's market, and then piles on a nice stack of doritos. Once the bologna has cooled a bit he adds two slices to it and closes it up. The crunch of doritos is phenomenal, wracking over his brain to produce the few good memories from growing up between the states of the deep South he has.

"I'm not in the mood to cook anything extravagant." Will picks up his paper plate and takes himself into the living room, sitting on his little couch to watch tv.

"You've made the most repugnant meals I've ever laid eyes on since we've arrived here," Hannibal says, carefully sitting on the other end. There's a piece missing, something even in death Hannibal hates to acknowledge.

Will's wife used to make him eat good food. Filled with love and spices and things that added a bit of weight to him. How horrible it must be to watch someone else feed your deity and they eat without problem when every bite you slid down their endless throat was met with teeth.

Will momentarily pins him with a look before turning away to find something to watch. "Is it? I've had some interesting meals at your house, things that no one in their right mind would eat willingly."

Hannibal is staring at him. He can feel his dead eyes burning against him like brimstone, judging him. "You ate willingly."

Will's lip twitches and his stomach turns with desire for something more than the meager sandwich he's made himself. The buttery warmth of flesh on his tongue, smothered in sauce and served in the flair that only Hannibal can add. He can imagine it, put together with a red wine reduction and a medley of vegetables only Hannibal would think to put together.

There's nothing like it, and god has he craved it more than he should have. Bad enough he thought about confessing it to the empty space of the universe, to slit himself open for the transgression of wanting.

"*Yes*." The word comes out sharp, hissing between his teeth. "I did."

Unmoored by his desire, Will takes an unnecessarily large bite of his sandwich. His fingers have punctured the soft bread in a vice grip and he can hear his father telling that no one is going to take it from him.

Hannibal's eyes move down the side of his face, over the curve of his jaw and the delicate skin of his throat. It makes him adjust in his seat, take another bite, and then settle. He doesn't mind the looking, Hannibal's always done that, but he's never done it like this in his home. It makes him wonder how many times he did it when Will couldn't see him.

After a few seconds of this, Hannibal turns to look at the tv. The show isn't that interesting, just one of the thousands of housing remodeling shows that air every day. He's sure he's watching it because he didn't get the reaction he wanted.

Then, for a split second, he thinks he should reach out. To touch him, to try again and again and again for anything but the static he knows is right there. The buzz that will burn through his hand like a purgatory he'll never enter. To hope that one day Hannibal might solidify between his fingers and come back from the grave, called out after so many days in death.

"Work tomorrow should be easy, I'll be off by three." Will hums around the crust of his sandwich, anything to stave off the silence. So, he teases, "promise to behave at the boatyard?"

Hannibal makes a noise of neither agreement nor disagreement; he's pretty obsessed with Will, rarely does he see a need to cause a commotion especially since he just started this job. Though, the comment does get the corners of his mouth to move upward and Will considers that to be a success.

Will chews on his sandwich and looks down at Winston who is curled up at his feet, staring at Hannibal in all his ghoulish glory. He's unbothered by him, often coming up to beg him for pats and treats. (Seemingly enjoying the odd way it feels when his dead hands brush his soft coat.) These actions take energy, meaning Will's phone often gets drained when Hannibal does these little things for him. These little things, they're good, they keep him tethered to reality. Physical proof that he isn't alone, that he isn't crazy. That this is fine. It's fine.

Still, he's trying not to think about the logistics of it too much. There's a level of caution he must take when observing the situation he's in and typically, he chooses to step away from the observation at all. He's trying to pretend this is completely normal, that Hannibal isn't dead eyed and gray, that his hands are warm and soft. That this is good, that this is the life they were destined to have when he ripped them from the unceremonious baptism Will forced upon them.

This is their life, this will be good for them both, as unconventional as it is. Will didn't rot for months and then leave his wife, paying too much extra for a speedy divorce, for this to fall apart. No one will get the satisfaction of seeing him crumble.

Two weeks with Hannibal and they've found a decent routine, something that makes them feel almost normal. Or at least, makes Will feel almost normal. He doesn't know how Hannibal feels, if he can feel. Obsession, obviously, but that's something he believes is just ingrained in his very being. Everything else though? The beauty? The adoration? The love? There's no way to know if that's still in there.

"Has Jack contacted you?" Hannibal asks abruptly.

Will blinks and looks at him out of the corner of his eye, trying to decipher him but unable to. The removal of their existences, the plane difference, keeps him distant in a way he hasn't felt in a long time. "Wouldn't you know if he did?"

“I assumed he may have, considering what has happened.” Hannibal shrugs, feigning nonchalance although Will knows that question could be nothing but intrigued… desperate. “He sent you my ashes. I doubt there are hard feelings.”

“I think he’s giving me space. Besides, he won’t ask me back.” Will takes another slow bite, he’s almost done, and he knows he should have made a second one because he’ll wake up ravenous in the middle of the night and have to fish something out of thin air. “Confusing feelings, I think. He needs time to process everything.”

That gets something more than the neutral expression he’s so familiar with. His eyes widen, just a fraction, like he’s genuinely surprised that he hasn’t been hounding Will about returning. “Why is that?”

“He knows. There’s a video out there that I’m sure he’s seen, that every person in the FBI above a certain pay grade has seen, and he knows how I feel. I think he always did, he just never wanted to admit it. He’d rather live in a lie.” Will shrugs one shoulder and takes the last bite of his sandwich. “Only one person has ever… been honest on that front. One person I like anyway.”

Alana. She didn’t understand it, but she seemed to accept it. When you’ve murdered someone yourself, it becomes easier to accept that someone could love a murderer. He makes a mental note to call her soon, to see how her little family has been holding up.

“Well enough, no need for him to come snooping around.” Hannibal’s thumb brushes under his eyes, a sudden movement he wasn’t expecting, and Will nearly flinches.

He wants to press his face into his palm, to kiss the skin there, to taste it on his lips. To try and find where he crucified him. There’s nothing there, though. Just the tingling he’s become so accustomed to in place of what was once the strong hands of the man he loved.

“What’s there to see?” Will laughs, strangled.

Hannibal pulls away, leaving Will to swallow down the gasp that perched under his chin. “Nothing yet. Still, I prefer to be acknowledged, I would hate to have to watch you pretend I’m not here again. Even for a phone conversation alone.”

“You’re the only person I talk to outside of work and my lawyer.” He admits, and even to his own ears that sounds insane. It sounds careless and vulnerable and just as he was 6 years ago and maybe that’s just fine. Maybe he needs a break from everyone else, a few weeks of just work and the house to really get everything squared away for himself.

“Good. I don’t wish to share you,” He whispers softly into his ear.

The entire room smells of ocean and sulfur and it burns down to Will’s lungs. Parts of him are still in the ocean, toppling over that cliff, and other parts are somewhere adrift, but the most important parts are right here. They’re engulfed in the buzzing of Hannibal’s hands, the reaction of his body, the desire for just a little more.

In all honesty, Will has never desired to share Hannibal either. Their codependency has always been a thorn in his side, but he can't feign innocence now–he's happy no one else can see him. It pleases him far more than it should, between his creaking bones, and then even deeper. Hannibal is his, whatever horrifying notion that is.

"You never have." Will counters, eyes scanning over his face. "But you were fine with me sharing you."

"You're right, I want all of you, all to myself. I have from the moment I met you." He says, "I have never asked for you to share me and now you never have to fear that you might."

"Bedelia." Will bites his tongue. He's never been a fan of her, and he especially isn't now. "And what happens when Jack finally calls for something?"

"You'll let the phone ring. I have had enough of sharing you with him. I never want to have to be in the same room as Jack Crawford again." Hannibal's eyes do something Will can't place. "Bedelia could have never been you, and should be reminded of that."

"She knows. She told me herself." The thrill that runs up his spine warms his gut, making the scar there pulsate in a way he's only felt in a context that makes him tremble with a feeling he refuses to name. "I was just stating a fact."

What are the facts though? Will can't ever be sure. Bedelia knows that she was a passing fantasy, she was a placeholder, a piece in a puzzle she wasn't completely privy to despite what she thought she knew. She was never a threat, somehow, she was just an obstacle. One Hannibal placed in front of him with purpose.

"No one who's ever thought they were mine should breathe the same air as you," Hannibal says seriously. "They should fall to your feet, like mountains to rocks."

Will's heart does something strange in his chest. "Well, they do."

Will stands then, unable to finish the conversation. Instead, he dumps his plate in the trash and mills around the kitchen for something to drink before bed.

There are many things to consider about their situation. About every strange thing he's done or said since Will left Molly. All of the little incentives to go out and cause his own personal brand of chaos. The Ripper Lives! Through the man that he whispers to, like a snake to the first, urging for him to take a bite and see.

Again. See again. He saw it, he felt it, he loved it.

After his glass of water, he stalks up the stairs and curls himself into the bed, shoving half his face into a pillow. Winston ducks under his bed, sleeping on the little mat Will placed for him. The house is silent with only the sound of the air conditioner whistling through the rooms. It's strange that he missed this and didn't even know it.

He can't see Hannibal, he never can in the darkness of his room, but he knows he's there. He knows he watches him sleep, and enjoys the vulnerability of it all. This is something he rarely

got before, something he had to take without Will knowing, and now he can look and he knows Will doesn't mind.

(Not that he would stop if Will did mine, but Will doesn't want to consider the implications of that.)

He glances into the darkest corner of the room, his mind playing over the conversations they've been having about killing Hannibal's old lovers. He's been hinting at it since their second day here, and he seems more and more keen with each passing day. Even the ones Will never knew, just seeking them out and killing them for doing something they didn't know would one day be so wrong.

The idea of it settles on him warmly and Will rolls to lay on his back. He hasn't killed since Hannibal, and he thought maybe he never would again. Killing alone seemed like a fruitless activity, it lacked all that he craved and found that night when they slaughtered the Dragon.

Now though, Hannibal is here. Real or not, he's whispering in his ear and Will is starting to fail in his attempts to ignore him because killing Bedelia does spark his interest. It has since he found her in Italy, and the only thing holding him back is the fact everyone would know who did it. At least, everyone in the FBI and one Freddie Lounds and that seems like a risk he shouldn't take. At least not yet.

There are others, but he isn't sure yet if he's willing to kill them. They never knew, they couldn't have. Some of them were before Will was even out of his father's house. People with lives, jobs, families. All dying for a sin they didn't even know they committed. But isn't that what god does?

Is it fair to kill them, to rip them out root and stem like a vengeful god unhappy with their meager offerings? Does he even care about fairness or does he care more about Hannibal seeing him do it? Watching him forgive like god?

His cock twitches at the thought of godliness, and Will presses his hand down against it, stifling a groan that tries to pry its way from between his teeth. His hand swipes over himself through his boxers once and his toes curl, a need for touch and to be touched too much. Desire for something he can never have.

The thought of Hannibal watching him stake his claim already has his skin tingling with unkempt desire. Slowly, he wraps his hand around the length of his cock. The fabric is a nice contrast to the grip of his hand, and he uses it for a rough edge as he quickly strokes himself.

He makes it quick and doesn't expose himself for him. Instead, he finishes in his underwear and lays there in his filth, unable to give them both the satisfaction that they so desperately want. Denying them both the full expanse of the intimacy that most lovers give to each other without question.

What it does accomplish is settling his mind enough that he feels himself drift into something calmer than he is now. Tugging him under for the night as he's watched over by the remnants of his lover, lost.

Chapter 10

Will is now in a full routine; eat, work, shop, sleep, rinse, repeat. That's it, and there's comfort in it. It feels like home in the same way being crucified does, and it often leaves him just a little raw in the way he always has been, in a way he understands. He likes it better like this, much better than rotting away in Molly's house like a walking corpse, with Methodist-Community Baptist-Lutheran-Presbyterian-whatever-the-fuck crawling around, trying to get him in the doors of a building that would rather see him burn up than hear his plight. Better than selling his soul to the FBI and killing himself over scene after scene of victims he couldn't help. Better than killing without purpose just for the sake of it.

This is better by a long shot, more comfortable. It's something he understands, loneliness and company that isn't quite there. If he's going to burn, he'd like to burn in the comfort of his own home like most men do. Sitting in a recliner with a glass of whiskey and an old George Jones vinyl on.

Much of him has tried to make heads and tails of this in the weeks that have passed, of Hannibal, of the cool words he whispers in his ears. Fuck whispering into the chrysalis, Will has popped out and is drying his wings, and Hannibal all but demands he dry faster. That he stretches to dry and land somewhere where he can drink the sweet nectar of someone's lifeblood.

Each time Hannibal suggests a kill, Will feels his heart rate increase. At first, he thought this was anxiety–his stomach turning and his palms sweating, but he's learned that this isn't that at all. This is excitement, it's lust. It burns him up and makes him want, wickedly.

Will has taken up, on occasion, the fantasize about what it might be like to kill again. A part of him wasn't sure if he'd be able to, given that Hannibal is dead and wouldn't be able to participate, but that part is equal in comparison to the part that thrills with the idea of Hannibal instructing him on how to do it. A new sort of dynamic, pack hunting to the ninth degree.

He doesn't know what's holding him back. Perhaps the intimacy of it all, or the lack thereof. Every kill before they ripped the Dragon apart was good, it felt nice, but killing with Hannibal was a holy revival bursting from his chest. Without him there, using his hands and teeth, he's unsure if it could ever feel the same. The idea of being instructed is exciting, but he's not sure it'll ever be exciting enough.

Still, he pines after it, and Hannibal has given him a laundry list of names, reasons they deserve to die, and how he might do it. One such man, Émile LaBlanc, has stuck with him. He's researched him, learning every detail about him from his job to any relationship he's had since Hannibal, and he's old, older than Hannibal was when Will killed him. Probably too old to have been with Hannibal given the timeline he knows.

Tonight though, his mind isn't on murder, or rotting, or his divorce. It's on the tv in front of him and the ghost of a man that sits close enough that his whole left side buzzes. It's on

Winston at his feet, slumbering the heat of the day away. It's on his full belly, and heavy eyes, and the comfort of just being.

It's a wet night, the clouds had been rolling in since before the sun disappeared over the treeline, and every few minutes thunder cracks wild, mixing with the gospel or rain and wind. He likes nights like this, especially because something about them seems to calm Hannibal. He becomes subdued and they can just enjoy whatever they are with each other. There are no demands, no subtle manipulations, no complaining about how Will lives. It's just them.

"I'm thinking about taking the boat out tomorrow," Will says when a commercial break starts.

He pours himself another glass of whiskey, warmed by it. He's got a throw blanket tucked tightly around him but even that can't keep all of Hannibal's morbid chill from sinking into his bones and it's far too warm outside to crank up the heat.

Hannibal looks at him, and when they make eye contact Will can tell he already knows what he's planning on doing. "Fishing?"

"They bite better after the rain," he sips his whiskey. "Besides, I figured you'd like it better if I had something fresh."

Hannibal makes a noise of neither agreement nor disagreement, and adjusts on the couch, as if he could be uncomfortable. The tingling in his side subsides, and Will stretches out, sinking the weight of himself into the cushions and rolling his head to crack his neck.

There's an illusion in this, when Hannibal leans against him just enough that the tingling takes up his side but doesn't dip into him. It's like they're normal, like he's right there, leaning on him while they watch reruns of bad sitcoms and nothing has ever separated them– nothing has ever separated them. Not even death could.

How easy it would be to reach out, to try and touch him. To walk on water to get to him, feel him, love him. That's all he wants, maybe it's always been what he wants. From that first day to now, and the rest of his life–even after. To do so would be to ruin the illusion though, and he doesn't want that.

"You'll enjoy it," he says around the lip of his glass, "I'll make it worth your while."

Hannibal looks at him again, seemingly blank. A lot of emotion has been lost in his eyes. What he can see is composed of larger feelings, rounded out and branching into other parts of his body language, but nuance? Nuance is gone in the dead void that stares back at him.

His blue lips part to say something, to let Will in on whatever is going through his head when Winston shoots up, ears perked up to listen to something more than the thunder. The dog stands there, fur on the back of his neck raised for a few seconds too long and then dashes off to the kitchen.

Will bristles at the sight. He's never known Winston to act like this, even with the form Hannibal's taken. The tingling returns to his body, his thigh, as Hannibal places a hand there

to offer some sort of reassurance. It does nothing, so he stands to see Winston in the dark shadows, pawing at the door. He's not growling, not barking, but he's anxious.

They share a look and it's one of those big feelings. Hannibal is concerned, or as concerned as a dead man can be over someone showing up in the middle of a storm. It isn't like they can hurt him, and even if they could, he doesn't think Hannibal would actually care in a way that matters. No, if anything he's more concerned about Will – whether it's for his safety or for his attention, he'll never know.

Either way, his concern coupled with Winston's pawing sets Will into motion. The first thing he does is grab for his gun. Not the rifle, but his handgun. He's become rather cagey about it, keeping it on his person at all times. Even at Molly's, he wasn't comfortable without it. Who knows who could show up, and he's had enough run-ins with crazy sons of bitches that he isn't willing to risk it anymore.

He takes gentle, calculated steps as he walks to the kitchen. He doesn't turn any of the lights on, worried it'll alert whoever's outside.

Whimpering, Winston looks back at Will, his dark eyes shine in the stove light. Outside, there's a figure making its way up from a car he doesn't recognize. It's too dark to make out who it is, and dare he say what it is, since it seems anything is possible. They walk slowly, shoulders back, chin up. Whatever they're here for, they know exactly who lives here.

The figure makes it all the way to the steps when the motion light comes out and shrouds Chiyoh in a horrible yellow light. Soaking despite her rain clothes, she seems unaffected and comes up each step without looking at Will who's already opened the door for her.

"Chiyoh?" Will asks, trying to mask his shock. "I didn't expect to see you. Figured if you wanted revenge, you'd have done it sooner."

She's already inside, not waiting for an invitation. Her shoes are off, she hangs up her raincoat by his door. "You killed him. Tell me why."

Will blinks and shuts the door to keep the rain sprayed wind out. He passes her, heads to his coffee machine, and starts a pot. He wants to be calm and collected at this moment, to be a good host, but he knows she's not here for anything good. This isn't a pleasant visit.

He pulls out one of the mugs from his cabinets, something to keep himself occupied. "I promise what you've seen on the news isn't true. I'm no hero, that's just what they want everyone to think."

"I know what you are," she accuses coldly. What is he, he wonders. At least, what is he to her? He knows what he is to everyone else, and he has clear views on that, but Chiyoh is a wildcard he hasn't quite pinned down.

Of course, it's easy to know why she's here. What her motivation is for this visit, how she feels, but how does she view him? She knows what he is, and somehow to her, he may be worse than Hannibal was.

A part of him believes that Chiyoh thinks Hannibal never had a choice, doomed from the start, marked by god to wander the earth as the monster he was. Yet somehow Will did. He had a choice (but he didn't, not really), he could have been anything else, but he chose this life and that's worse. At least, in her eyes.

Will looks at Hannibal as he pours Chiyoh a cup of coffee. It would be nice if he could help him in any way. Save him from the conversation he's about to have, and he really could if he wanted to but he won't. At least not yet.

"She's here to kill you," he says when he catches Will looking at him. He's leaned against the entryway, prepared to observe however this plays out. "Very bold of her."

No help then. Will sighs and walks to meet her where he stands. He's not scared of Chiyoh, especially not in close proximity. The gun is her greatest weapon and her ultimate vice.

"Why don't you sit, we can talk this out." He steps away and to his refrigerator. "Milk? Sugar?"

She doesn't sit, coffee in hand, and denies him the pleasure of sweetening it with anything. She wants him to be uncomfortable, unsettled by her. If this were any other time, maybe he would be, but right now all he can think about is the fact her hair is dripping water onto his kitchen floor and Hannibal looks far too amused for his own good.

"I told you–"

"It was a botched murder-suicide, so I didn't just kill him. I wanted to die with him." He cuts her off before he can go into her self righteous monologue about what he should and shouldn't have done. He knows this doesn't make it better. That it never could. "So don't come here and tell me what you told me. This," he gestures to himself, "it was never supposed to be."

"Then why are you still alive?" She asks.

It's easy to tell she isn't asking how he survived, she's asking why he hasn't gone ahead and killed himself now. Why he wakes up every day and lives when he so desperately wanted to die with Hannibal? It's an honest question, one he doesn't have an answer to. More than once over these last months he'd thought about it, came close to doing it, but hasn't.

Will stares at her for a minute, trying to decide what to do in this situation. Choosing not to answer what she's really asking to save himself the confusion, he says, "Saved in time by the FBI."

There's a long length of silence. Hannibal watches Will who watches Chiyoh who watches him back. They're all waiting for something to happen, for one of them to be struck down, or to do the striking. Nothing he says about that night will soothe her, and frankly, nothing he says will soothe himself.

When the silence goes on too long, too calculating, he takes one step towards her. "He's still here," Will adds, voice pathetically soft.

“His ashes.” She looks at the box he has on his counter knowingly. “How hard you must have fought to keep every part of him. Was this the final straw for your wife?”

“No–yes, his ashes are here but he is too. Like his spirit.” Will says and almost doesn’t realize how insane that sounds.

Weeks with Hannibal have made this start to feel normal, and sometimes he forgets that everyone else sees him as alone. They don’t experience it, or they try to deny it. Denying is easy, better than acknowledging that the room is freezing, that things go missing, that they move.

She eyes him with the kind of look the people in the FBI would give him when he was sick with encephalitis and everything thought the other shoe had finally dropped on his sanity. “He’s a ghost?”

Will nods once, trying not to seem desperate. “Yes.”

Chiyoh looks at him, really looks at him. “I came here with the intention of killing you,” she puts the coffee down, untouched. “I am sure you will kill yourself, though.”

“You think I’m crazy,” Will snaps. Somehow this has hit a nerve with him, her certainty that he’s unwell. “I know how this sounds, I thought–sometimes I still think maybe I’ve lost it but I know what I see. What I feel. This doesn’t feel like that.”

Hannibal steps over to Will and places his hand on his shoulder, and the tingling feels safe in a way it hasn’t before. “Will, don’t push yourself.”

A deep horror passes over her face, stricken and disturbed by him. “I think you should have died in the ocean with him, as you wished.”

Hannibal’s hand touches the back of Will’s neck. Icy, comforting. It isn’t there, but it’s full, somehow. Like he’s willing it to be so.

Will takes a breath. “You’re the only person I’ve told, I don’t need you to believe me but I need you to consider it. I can’t be crazy, I’m not having hallucinations. This isn’t my empathy. I’m serious.”

“I believe you are a sick man, and that your love for him turned violent in a way you couldn’t control. I believe you are grasping for control again.” She says, “I believe you wish you were dead.”

“Chiyoh, he’s right here.” Will insists, he looks to Hannibal, pleading.

Her eyes scan the room, as if she’s truly looking for him but the tight draw of her lips gives her away. “Where?”

“She will not believe if she doesn’t wish to,” Hannibal warns, but steps away from Will all the same.

It takes a lot of energy to move things, especially in a way that matters. He can suck it from the electricity in the house, from cellphones, and sometimes even Will if need be. This is one of those times.

The lights flicker, Will's body feels so weak he has to lean against the counter, and he steps over to move the coffee cup. Will was hoping for something bigger, but he'll take what he can get. Besides, he's in no place to make requests. It takes some time for him to move the cup, but it moves. Not far, just enough to matter. Enough that it should startle her.

Chiyoh contemplates the movement, a breath caught in her throat, but doesn't seem convinced. Or, she's trying to remain oblivious the way Molly did when things got moved, when cabinet doors opened and closed when the tv would randomly go out. If anything, she looks at Will with a deep set skepticism that annoys him. If anyone was going to believe him, it's Chiyoh, and the fact she's willingly forcing herself upsets him.

"Maybe I should still kill you," she whispers. "That would be good for you. You would not suffer this madness."

Something about that sets Hannibal off. His body twitches, if Will can even call it that. It's like he comes unglued and his joints move awkwardly, mechanically, twisting in ways they shouldn't be able to. He blurs around the edges like he's fading out. The room is engulfed by sulfur and ocean air, and the cup flings from the table in less than a second, smashing against the cabinet and splintering so hard they both flinch. The liquid splatters with little pieces of ceramic.

His heart beats heavily, blood rushing through his ears. Chiyoh takes several steps away from the table, from Will. They share a cord of terror in this moment, an anger from Hannibal that they both have never seen.

"The point is made," Hannibal says, himself again just as quickly as he wasn't and takes his place back by Will's side. "She will not doubt you again."

She won't, but he doesn't know how to comprehend what happened himself. What he saw.

"Now I have to clean that up." Will sighs in an attempt to lighten the mood; his voice trembles as he tries to regain himself. "Do you see though? He's here. He has been… for a while. He's attached to me."

Chiyoh's face is tight, her shoulders drawn back defensively. She can't see him, but without the forced obliviousness, she can sense him. "Are you sure it is Hannibal?"

Will looks at her and then glances at Hannibal out of the corner of his eye. "What else would he be?"

"Something demonic," she says. Her eyes flickering over him and the air beside him where Will just looked. "Something *wrong*."

Will goes to touch the necklace his father gave him but comes up empty like he always does. The Christ isn't here, it cannot save him from her accusations. From the partial truth to them.

“She would believe that,” Hannibal says, touching Will’s shoulders again, the comfort of it is gone and replaced with the same empty buzz it has been. “It would be easier to believe.”

“I’m sure it’s Hannibal.” He is, but he isn’t sure Hannibal isn’t also something demonic, hasn’t become that since his death. Parts of him have remained the same, deeply woven in his soul, but still, other parts have twisted. Stuck between this realm and that, he’s bleeding into something new, maybe even something horrifying. Worst of all, he also isn’t sure he cares.

She’s unnerved by this, by the way Will doesn’t react horribly to the idea that Hannibal is as much himself as he isn’t. Finally, she sits at the little table. Winston seems to notice her distress and comes to her aid, bumping his nose against her thigh and then placing his head there. She looks down to stare at him before tentatively petting his soft fur.

Will crouches down to pick up the pieces of the mug, careful not to step on any or cut his hand.

“You waited a long time to come,” he says as he throws the first handful of pieces away. “I really did expect you to be sooner.”

“You were with your wife and child, unlike some, I do have morals.” She swallows and takes a slow breath. “I read about what you let happen to them, what he let happen. I am not like either of you.”

“Good to know.” Will cleans the remains of the cup off and then takes a few paper towels and soaks up the coffee off of his cabinet and floor. “Will you be staying?”

Chiyoh waits a few seconds, debating, before she answers. “Only for the night.”

Glancing over, he can tell that she doesn’t even want to be here for the night. That if the storm outside wasn’t raging, and promised to get worse, she’d be gone now. She’d probably have left as soon as the cup hit the cabinet and he can’t blame her for it.

“You planned on killing me and then raiding my fridge?” He laughs, still trying to calm her. “Torture me and eat all my bologne and doritos?”

“I planned to torture you for what you did. That is why I came directly to the door instead of waiting and shooting you from a distance.” She nods, another deep breath accompanied by a scratch behind Winston’s ear. “I would have made sure your food did not go to waste. However, I would have fed the meat to him.”

“You don’t trust me?” Will asks, teasingly.

Of course, she doesn’t. He’s just as much a cannibal as Hannibal. At least someone knows the truth of it all.

“No, I don’t,” She says, and Will hands her a second cup that she drinks fully, in a matter of seconds.

How horrifying it must be, to have your entire perception of reality destroyed like that. By Hannibal nonetheless. He wonders if this is the first time for her, or if she once received her

own special treatment.

“Can I get you set up for the night?” He asks. “I cleaned out my guest bedroom recently so you’re in luck. You won’t have to sleep on the couch.”

“She may still kill you,” Hannibal cautions as Will comes to sit at the table. “Quicker now, perhaps.”

“Do you believe this is good for you? This attachment?” She asks honestly, voice low. “Do you believe it is good for him to be in our world?”

Will glances over at Hannibal who has taken his spot back at the entryway. “It’s… no worse than what it was before. I can’t change it now, I might as well make peace with it.”

“You could call a priest.” She suggests. “Free you both from this.”

Will’s stomach turns, flashes of him being held down, of praying, of begging with little chubby hands reaching towards his father. “I would sooner die than invite any kind of Holy Man into my house. Besides, I don’t think that could affect Hannibal. You know how he feels about god.”

She scans his face twice over, lips pulled tight. Will doesn’t know what she’s looking for, but whatever it is, she doesn’t find it. “Love is a terrible thing.”

“I know.” Will agrees. “It has teeth.”

“You are a terrible man,” she says and stands, rinsing her cup out and offering Winston a few more pets. “He has always made you worse. Even now, he whispers in your ear.”

“Maybe,” Will murmurs, and shows her up to the guest room.

Will locks himself in the master bedroom once she’s disappeared behind the door. Shaking and cold, he waits until he hears her settle into the bed before he goes around to collect himself. He showers at the hottest temperature, brushes his teeth too rough, and crawls under the blankets in sweatpants and a t shirt.

“She loves you,” Will whispers into the cold, dark air. “Too much.”

“Love is a terrible thing, it has teeth,” Hannibal repeats, and sits on the edge of the bed, watching Will carefully, like he does every night until he finally sleeps.

The next morning, Chiyoh is gone. Will isn’t sure how long she stayed, if she was even able to sleep, but the bed is made and her boots and coat and car have disappeared.

All that’s left is a coffee stained cup in the sink, a slip of paper clipped to the fridge, and a pot of coffee she started. If it weren’t for these things, he’d almost assume she was a hallucination.

He inserts her number into his phone. If she found it important enough to leave, then he’ll take it. Maybe he will need her for something in the future, maybe he won’t. She seems to

believe he will, though.

“Chiyoh never stays with people long,” Hannibal says as Will pours himself a cup of coffee. “Even given the best of circumstances.”

“She seemed more disturbed than I’ve seen her,” Will looks at him hard. “You did too much.”

“People often become disturbed when they’re presented with something beyond themselves,” Hannibal offers. “Even those of us we see as unmovable. I did what was necessary.”

Will’s throat clicks as he takes a sip of his coffee. There’s nothing he can do about it now, but her reaction to this haunts him anyway. The suggestion to call a priest, to do anything to get rid of Hannibal makes his skin crawl.

It took him this long to have him and he will not lose him in an event that’ll cause him significant emotional distress. That’ll leave him alone and disturbed and sick for days, weeks. No, this is the way it is now, and he’s fine with it. This is a blessing, a miracle, however dark it may be.

“Do you think she’ll be back?” Will asks, trying to rid his mind of the image of Hannibal flinging the cup.

Hannibal watches him, eyes void again. “Perhaps, today though, I believe you wanted to worry about fishing?”

Nodding, he heads back upstairs with his cup to dress for the day.

Chapter 11

He's expecting her to show up again, like a thief in the knight with a knife and a vendetta. Although, he thinks he'd prefer the gun to anything else. Knives are biblical, they're holy in the way Hannibal's hands were, his anger, his violence. Those hands, his blade, gave him rebirth. Just as Will did to him, resurrecting him as something new, something that breathes a darkness, a malignant growth, into his lungs and swallows him whole.

Something about this waiting, and the horrible growth in him, has him on edge. Not like before, not like when his brain was burning or when he thought he hated Hannibal. No, this– this is paranoia. Chiyoh's unwarned visit, and the knowledge that people look at him and know who he is, even if they won't say it, sends him into a spiral. The kind that lasts for weeks, the kind that makes him look over his shoulder. Checking for the FBI, god, the ghosts of others he's killed.

The second week after she stayed, he thought he was getting it under control. The feelings were being stamped out, and his shoulders relaxed again. He was going through each day in his routine, trying to find comfort again in what he has and the opportunity he's been given, this second chance. Then he opened his laptop and found an email pinged from Alana Bloom.

That immediately brought anxiety back, burning up his throat as bile, and when he clicked it, he saw why she's sent him anything at all. Freddie Lounds has been talking to Molly, (the article's titled, *MOLLY FOSTER-GRAHAM, EX WIFE OF AMERICAS SUPPOSED 'HERO'*) and granted, his soon-to-be ex wife told her to kindly fuck off, but she's really written a piece about it. With the little information Molly offered up–yes, they're getting divorced, no it isn't because she cheated, no Will hasn't been in contact with her, no she doesn't want to be interviewed–Freddie has made something substantial.

There were pictures of him at work, the grocery store, getting gas. The only place she hadn't been is his house in Wolf Trap, and god, he knows she'll do it. She'll come here too, so that offers him little comfort. More than Chiyoh is watching him, and he should have expected it, but it's terrifying to realize. He'll never have peace, not so long as he's alive.

It doesn't help that Hannibal is… demanding. Demanding and clingy and always right there. Logically, he understands it. Will ripped his soul out, played god, and now he has to answer for it. Like any god, his follower demands retribution after death, to be close to him for all the years served. It's what any follower pleads for after a life of dedication, and it's only fair.

Now though, after Chiyoh's visit and the eyes, the hidden cameras on him every day, he's become annoyed with it. It isn't Hannibal's fault that they have some unholy attachment, but it has begun to grate on him. Every little demand to kill, the eyes on him even when he sleeps, the whispers in his ears while he works. Their moment of comfort has gone, in place stands paranoid aggravation and a desire for space.

"Do you have to watch me like that?" Will asks as he ties a lure together. He's been working on this same one for too long, but nothing looks right and he's already tossed it once in

frustration. “It’s unsettling.”

Hannibal is perched on the couch, dead eyes flashing as he observes him. This is so normal, it’s part of their routine, he has no reason to change his behavior. “What else would you have me do?”

“Anything else, I’ve always hated how you watch me,” Will’s coarse, his throat dry and stern. He’s angrier than he should be, and it isn’t all at Hannibal, but some of it is.

The paranoia leaks down into his lungs, fighting for room with the darkness Hannibal has breathed into him. He can’t serve two masters, he knows that, but it feels good to be paranoid. In a fucked up way, it almost feels comforting. He should be paranoid, not about Freddie or Chiyoh or the FBI, but about his haunting. It should unsettle him, second chance or not.

“Have you? I don’t recall.” Hannibal hums, amused by his frustration.

“I reckon you don’t recall anything,” Will sucks in a breath, trying to calm himself. He feels an outburst coming, his chest feels tight and his head is splitting. “It’s worse now.”

“Perhaps I would watch you less if I knew you were well.” Hannibal feigns concern, tilting his head. “You haven’t been yourself, Will. Not since Chiyoh’s appearance.”

“I am well,” he snaps.

Hannibal smooths his hands over his clothes, the movement nothing more than an act, a show to make Will view him as anything but ghastly. His suit never folds or creases, it’s stuck in a permanent perfection. “Well enough to kill?”

“Don’t start,” he pushes the lure to the side, scrubbing his hands over his face. “I’m serious right now. I don’t want to hear it.”

“Consider all the work that has been done.” Hannibal presses, “I match your severity, Will. I think this is a conversation that needs to be had.”

“Hannibal, I need to lay low.” Will pushes his chair back, the legs screeching against the hardwood floor. “Freddie Lounds is on my ass. I can’t risk this, not right now.”

His eyes hurt, ears ringing. He can hear the electrical pulses through the house and smell Winston. When he pushes the chair back under, it screeches again and his whole body twitches.

“There are new things happening, Will. They have forgotten about you. About us. You’ve put so much thought into killing Émile, I believe you would benefit from it.” Hannibal moves, mirroring him in his stance. There he goes, demanding attention like a child at the altar. “One kill, states away. They would never know it was you. She would never know it was you.”

“I’m not having this discussion with you again. You’re getting real pushy.” Will touches the couch as he slips through and into the kitchen, pouring himself a glass of iced tea.

A part of him wants something harder than tea, making to even spike it, but in the back of his mind his paranoia is turning into the crushing voice of his father and he really can't afford to add the fear of hell for homosexuality to the laundry list of reasons he may very well rip.

He swallows down three mouthfuls of tea, letting the coolness soothe him. If he can just get through the way, he thinks he'll be fine. Of course, he needs to be more proactive in concealing himself, but god, why can't he have peace? He works on boats, he keeps to himself, he isn't running around crime scenes. Can't he catch a break?

"What was the purpose of your becoming, of our sacrifice, if you refuse to utilize it, Will?" Hannibal asks, standing between the kitchen and the living room.

Will pauses, momentarily stricken by the thought. "Don't do that, don't use that against me."

"I allowed you to kill me, the least you could do is not let it go to waste." Hannibal says matter-of-factly, but the last word, it shakes in a way Will didn't know was possible for a being like him.

Will slams his cup down, his tea sloshing over the side. The thought of things being wasted needs to be pushed far from his mind. He never wants to think of it, of what it means that Hannibal's body was cremated and sat in a box again. "I *hate* you. I hate you, I hope you know that."

"Will–"

"You know, they know what we did? Everything. It isn't a secret. They spun a story that I'm some hero but there's a video of us killing together. Of us holding each other." Will's voice raises, shrills around the edges. "They saw it all, Hannibal. Every single thing. I'm lucky they aren't on my ass right now. That they didn't arrest me for it."

Hannibal blinks slowly, as if he hadn't thought of that–and maybe he hadn't. It doesn't matter though, this Hannibal, this dead, warped, version of him is demanding to a fault. "The FBI's knowledge has hardly ever stopped you before."

"It is now, though. They've stopped watching but they're on edge, Hannibal. I caused a scene." Will slams his hand on the counter and then shakes it when it soaks in tea. "Freddie Lounds is watching, isn't that enough? Will it ever be enough?"

"You looked very capable of causing a scene in the hospital," Hannibal all but sneers, tone clipped. "Ms. Lounds has certainly never stopped you before. The only thing stopping you now is yourself."

"Fuck off." Will drops the cup into his sink, listening to the glass ting against the metal before he snatches his shoes on. He doesn't even tie them, just moves across the room to start gathering stuff.

He grabs his truck keys, his phone, his wallet, and whistles for Winston who has been sleeping at the foot of the couch through this entire encounter. He needs space he can never have again, he needs time to think. Quiet. Anything but this.

Of course, he wants to kill, he wants to feel warm blood beneath his hands and takes his pick of smooth organs, to chew the meat between his teeth and become god to another, someone who won't haunt him. At least, he wants to try it and see what it's like without Hannibal's physical body beside him, but he doesn't want to get arrested. He isn't sure they'll put him in the BSHCI, more worried they'll go for the death penalty.

Who does he have to vouch for him now? Alana, maybe, but that's it. His reputation because the US needed a hero. That's it, everyone else is either dead or wishes they were.

"You are aware I am attached to you." Hannibal states, following closely behind Will as he stomps through the yard, dead grass crunching under his loose books as he stomps.

"I'm not listening." Will says, a bit lounger. Childish, maybe, but he really wants it to be quiet. Just for five minutes, he wants everything to go away and to just be him.

"If you leave the house, I must do the same." Hannibal argues, just a step behind him. Even in the heat, Will's skin is chilled from Hannibal, the hairs on his arm and neck stand, his stomach drops. "I go where you go. Until your last day."

"I can't hear you!" He yells, his middle and index finger brush over each other at his side in a repeated motion, attempting to soothe himself. To bring him back down. "I'm not listening!"

Hannibal's frowns and stops, allows Will to go to his truck without him, allows for Winston to run past him and bump against his thigh. "This is *very* becoming of you, Will. Please, try and run from this. As you have everything before."

Will bristles, his fingers stop, his keys pressed firmly into the lock on his truck door. Has he always run? No, he hasn't. Not every time, and the times he didn't, Hannibal was the one running. Circles and circles, around and around. They're stuck in this loop, and even in Hannibal's death, they might never truly break it.

He turns to look at him and all his horrifying glory. He takes two steps towards him, and for a moment, he forgets he can't touch him, that his hand can only feel the remnants of him. Fingers pass through him where he went to take hold of him and they both flinch.

"You know what, I did everything I could." Will whispers, chest stuttering. "I tried to save you, I fucking dragged your body out of the ocean and did everything I could to revive you. I'm sorry I fucking failed but doesn't that count for something? You act like I want to be separated from you. Like I didn't try!"

Whatever Hannibal's feeling, it's complicated, it makes his eyes void and his face blank. It gives Will nothing to work with. "You wanted me to die."

"I wanted to die with you, but more than that, I wanted to *live* with you. I tried." He says desperately, hands shakingly finding his hair, "don't you know that? Didn't you see?"

Hannibal looks over his face, his lips part like he might say something, like it might be something Will can't stand hearing, but then recalculates. "I do not regret dying for your becoming, I only regret not being able to rot inside you."

“I want you to regret it.” Will turns away, hands pushing his overgrown hair from his face and he kicks the door of his truck so hard it dents. “Why are you here? Isn’t there… something else? Another side? A void? Somewhere you should be.”

Hannibal hesitates then, for the first time in a long time, he’s unable to formulate a response. It isn’t so he can come out with an answer, it isn’t because he wants to lie or demand or force. He just doesn’t know.

Will glances over his shoulder in a moment of stunned silence, his mouth dries. Then he whispers, “I’m your personal hell.”

“Being near you but not being able to have you.” Hannibal averts his gaze as he agrees.

What a way to exist. Barred from whatever awaits the rest, Hannibal is cursed with this life. With Will, to exist as he lived, without him in the ways that matter.

“Then you were living in your own personal hell for five years before you died. This shouldn’t be different.” Will turns back to the truck, swallowing around a thickening in his throat. “You shouldn’t be here. If you’re meant to be in hell, there should be fire and brimstone. Not–me.”

“I was working, then. Those five years. Whispering. Now, you reject it all.” Hannibal’s face tightens, he comes closer and the temperature around Will drops. “I can’t say if this is my hell, but it certainly isn’t heaven.”

A gust of wind blows above them, whistling distantly, and Will presses his forehead against the window of his truck. Neither of them speak, they just allow the heaviness of what this may mean to settle over them, deep in their bones, in their marrow.

All of it is horrid, and all of it very well may be Will’s fault. They could have ran, they should have. The ocean offered nothing more than a wake, funeral, and final resting for what could’ve been between them. Will’s folly killing what he could taste and only leaving the flavor of decay.

Finally, Will turns back to look at Hannibal, they’re nearly chest to chest and it gives him the exact view he wants. He needs to see him, his dead eyes and blue tinged skin. To smell the ocean and sulfur and let it take him over, to bring him closer to this version of Hannibal. To try and make all of this worth it. However, most importantly, he wants to get his point across.

“Hannibal, I’m not rejecting it. I can’t do it. I don’t know if I want to do it without you.” Will’s face falls, he hates this. He hates what he’s done to them. “We killed the Dragon and I can’t even explain how it felt, I can’t imagine never feeling that again. If I kill again, it may be the last time.”

“I would feel void without the killing. I can gain pleasure from watching you, you don’t wish to take that from me as well, do you?” Hannibal looks him in the eyes, unwilling to lose this battle.

Will goes rigid, biting into the soft tissue of his inner cheek and then brushing his fingers against each other again. “No, of course not. I just… want you to know.”

“Then pick someone, plan it and kill them and leave no evidence.” Hannibal commands. “Do it, then decide how you feel.”

There’s no winning, he knows that. One kill is never going to satisfy him. It’s not about what he wants, it never has been. He’s been stupid to think that Hannibal would think that way, especially this grotesque amalgamation of his former lover. What he wanted, that was nothing more than a fantasy.

“Hannibal.”

“Beloved.”

Will closes his eyes, cold and alone in every way that matters. “Why are you here?”

“Will, we’ve discussed this–“

“No, Hannibal. Why are you here? Is this your own personal hell or do you feel like you have unfinished business?” Will asks severely. “I need the truth, the whole of it. I need to know that you understand that I tried–I need you not to use your death against me to get your way.”

Scowling, Hannibal takes a step back from Will, as if the mere idea that he could be keeping the truth from him is a horrible offense. As if he hasn’t before. “What would I gain from lying now?”

Will blinks, and then turns to him. “Do you remember what happened after? When I pulled you up from the ocean. Do you remember what I did?”

“Of course.” Hannibal scoffs. “I have been with you every step of the way. From my death to now, we have been together.”

Have they? Will isn’t sure. Hannibal’s beating around the bush on it, and Will goes to touch his necklace, his wedding ring, and then shoves his hand in his pocket for the misstep. He doesn’t wear those anymore, fiddling with jewelry can’t save him from the truth of all of this. From what he did, from how he destroyed Hannibal.

Will swallows, almost laughs. “You’re lying.”

“Will.” Hannibal shakes his head, trying to cut the conversation short. “This is enough. Come back inside. Finish your lures.”

“Oh, now you’re the one who’s tired of this conversation?” Will demands, “tell me the truth. All of it, right now.”

“I am.” Hannibal insists, trying to coax him back toward the house. “The whole of it, I have not lied to you once since my death.”

Maybe he can’t do this. Maybe he does need a break from it all, even if he can’t get a break from Hannibal himself. Not only is he paranoid, terrified someone is watching him, even now, but Hannibal is lying. He’s lying and Will can’t even imagine to what end. He’s dead, he’s gone, he’s a soul without a mortal form to take. What more could he want?

Will groans and flings the truck door open, letting Winston in first and then Hannibal. “Until you’re honest with me I’m not killing and I’m not talking to you, so I hope you like silence.”

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> i planned on this being longer but then my cousin and her milf gf broke up and i had to go 2 1/2 hours upstate to get her

The two boil in their silence. Will's skin peeling, bones bleaching as his tender flesh falls off around them and onto the raw plain of their nervous relationship. As for Hannibal, he seems to be less human, if he ever was to begin with. Days turn into weeks into months, and while Hannibal is right there, right beside Will every waking moment, they aren't even looking at each other. Coexisting as an amalgamation of mania and dread and loneliness. It feels like he's cut his hand off.

Loneliness is the worst part of it all for Will. Fuck the paranoia, the dread, the knowledge that Freddie Lounds is still watching him, that everyone is. Hannibal is right there and he can't even touch him; the last time he did was on the beach, clinging to his corpse as he waited for death to pass over him so they could finally have something together. God, if he knew then what he knows now, he'd have held a little tighter, fought a little harder, found something to slit himself open and bleed before the FBI could rescue him. Now all that's left is the bastardized spirit of a man who was already damned and a pool of silence they've both baptized themselves in.

Aside from the touching, which he was never used to, the lack of speaking is worse. Their relationship was never dependent on physicality–he enjoyed it, of course, fantasized about it, what it could be like one day to put his hands on Hannibal and feel him like people wish to feel the scars in their Messiah's wrists–but there were layers to what they had. Conversations that could expand all the way to the heavens, that even god couldn't understand. He separated the world, made men speak different languages so they couldn't become more like him, but was mistaken when he let Hannibal and Will speak a common tongue.

Now, that common tongue they both know, that error on god's part, is all Will craves but can't have. The most they share is a side eye in the car or when Will makes something for dinner Hannibal views as ghastly (which has been far more frequent as Will is trying his hardest to try and get Hannibal to react), but even these little looks aren't helpful in gentling him. He doesn't know those eyes. They're duller as days pass, the longer he's stuck between this life and the next. The longer he goes without the humanization of Will.

Will wonders if it hurts him the same, to not speak. To not even look at him as they go about their days–Will is his own personal hell so maybe it doesn't, maybe it's better for him. Hannibal isn't the same anyway, he's different, strange, but underneath it all, he still bristles when Will pulls out bologna and rolls his eyes when he goes out in a pair of pajama pants and ratty t-shirt. These little things remind him that some part of him is still the man he loves,

even if it's widely overshadowed by what he is now. Still, he wants him to hurt too, he wants him to be aching this way.

He does know he's feeling something. Whether it's that same ache, he can't be sure, but things start to happen. It's akin to having a cat, really, the way things go missing or glasses fall off the counter or Hannibal knocks three times on a wall and startles Will.

God, he wishes he could just communicate like a normal person – but when have they ever communicated like normal people? Before there were metaphors, tableau's, and passive aggressive dinners where they lied through their teeth. Now they have haughty eyes and Will has to go to the store and buy new silverware because Hannibal hid all his forks–not to mention the light bill with all the energy he needed to move them.

As the silence, and the annoyance, eats away at him, Will begins to plan. Maybe this has been Hannibal's idea the whole time, and maybe he's falling right into his trap, but at this point, he doesn't care. At this point, he's desperate.

Will moves his ashes, when he decides a random Tuesday in August will be the last day of their shared silence. He isn't doing this, he isn't being haunted by the man he tried so hard not to love and forced to live each day in oppressive, punishing, silence. Even if he said he wasn't going to talk to Hannibal first, he can't stand it. He thought he'd break first, but obviously not.

This is deafening. It's killing him. He's done.

Hannibal watches him out of the corner of his eye, his lips held tight. Every look is haughty, it makes Will's skin crawl. These aren't the eyes of someone who wants to devour him, he wants to whisper into the chrysalis, these are the eyes of something that wants to break him. He wants it to end.

"Do you want an urn?" Will places the box on the coffee table and then sits down beside it, leaning forward to rest his forearms against his thighs. "I can buy you a real nice one. However expensive you want."

Hannibal's eyes glance away, back to the tv.

Will sighs. "This is me offering an olive branch. I can't live like this, I refuse to. I know what I said but this is... Somehow silent treatment is worse than your demands. Or your lying."

That isn't met with anything more than a forced click of Hannibal's throat.

"I know you lied to me. I don't get why, but I know that you did." Will scrubs his hand over his face, his overgrown hair rustling as his hands move hard against his skin. "You can ignore me all you want but you're stuck right here with me. I know you want to talk to me, Hannibal."

Hannibal crosses his legs and looks up at Will. His stoic demeanor is one of his masks, it always has been, but somehow he perfected it in death, Will can't even find the cracks. "I haven't lied to you, Will."

Pushing himself from where he's slouched, Will sighs through his nose. He hates this, he hates that they can't just come to some kind of common ground. He hates that even now, Hannibal has such a stark grip on Will and what he does and doesn't do.

"You're lying to me right now. Again. I know you don't remember anything after we hit the water. I know because if you did, you'd have brought it up." He pushes the box to the side and adjusts so that he can look Hannibal directly in the eyes, so he can find the pieces of him that still exist in there, somewhere. "I can't believe I didn't realize sooner. It would have been the first thing you brought up."

Hannibal's lips curl. Briefly, he looks young, like the edges of him start to blur and his hair darkens and his eyes widen in anger. "I suppose you attempted to resuscitate me. You have my ashes, so you at least pulled my body from the ocean."

"Yeah, yes." Will breathes with some mix of relief and anger. It feels good to say it out loud, it feels good that someone knows–someone who should know. Not Price. Not Zeller. Not Jack. He's been waiting to spill this, to talk about what happened on that beach. Someone needs to know.

Will rubs his hands together, needing the friction. His leg bounces, and he thinks. There are a lot of things he could say, a lot of things he should and shouldn't, but he can't demand the truth from Hannibal and then refuse to give it himself.

Finally, after an extended period of unnecessary silence, Will looks up at Hannibal again. "I also kissed you, your corpse. I resigned myself to die on the beach beside you. It isn't my fault the FBI came before I could so whatever unhappiness you have toward me for living, it isn't my fault. You don't have to treat me like this, you don't need to lie to me or ruin my things."

"Like what? My killer? I died by your hand. For *you*. I was ripped from the afterlife for *you*. I was there–" he hesitates, "then I was watching your body in a hospital. Your wife was there, your son. We have this same conversation, and you will always come to the same conclusion. Dead or alive, I am your antagonist."

Will flattens his hand against his leg, willing it to stop bouncing. "I don't want to fight with–you. I want to use this chance I've gotten and be happy with it. I wish I could change what happened, you're not my antagonist, Hannibal."

Despite his closed off posture, Hannibal's eyes brighten. For a moment, he's the man Will knew. He's there and present and interested. "Then what am I, Will?"

His eyes water, burning with tears. The look on his face, it's the same one he wore the night Hannibal gutted him. Forlorn, desperate to cling to whatever broken piece of the man he could have. "You're mine. I have you now, no one else ever can, but I need us to be equals."

"We have always been equals." Hannibal rubs one hand over the back of the couch, his blue tinted skin seeming more rosy than usual. "I always have been yours, Will. Perhaps from the beginning."

What beginning he's talking about, Will isn't sure. In Jack's office? Or even further back?

For whatever reason, Will slots his knees between Hannibal's. He doesn't let them touch, unwilling to break the illusion that they're close, that they're in the same material plane. It feels like one of their old therapy sessions, like he could reach out now and take his hand and they could talk about what he's mulling around in his mind.

He breathes out, the smell of sulfur in the room has depleted, but the cold has stayed. "What did you see when you died?"

Hannibal's body goes rigid, it's a strange sight. Even in this form, he's always so fluid, so comfortable. "Nothing."

"No, there was something. Tell me what it was. We're equals, right? Then I need you to be honest." He goes to touch the crucifixion around his neck and blinks at the emptiness there. He doesn't know why he keeps reaching for something he hasn't worn in years. It makes him feel like those old women in church, gripping their necklaces as the preacher condemns all of humanity to hell. "Did you see your sister, or…"

Hannibal eyes cut him open and then he looks away. "It was a void. Purgatory maybe. However, I was at peace."

Will nods a little, but he can hear the lie on his lips. There was something, and he doesn't know why Hannibal refuses to tell him. He got the truth of the matter he pressed about, which he's thankful for, but there's something more, something he's keeping from Will.

Everything is a mind game, even now. Will has to push, to break them, and then put them back together because the creature before him is far too prideful to do much more than let Will suffer.

He clears his throat and smiles, but it doesn't meet his eyes. "I want this to work."

Hannibal softens just a bit. "As do I."

In the back of Will's mind he thinks of what they used to have, how they communicated before. He stares at their legs, not touching, but with the memory of it. All Hannibal wants is for him to dry his wings and not let his becoming go to waste–he's already looked into the man, Émile, he doesn't live nearby, he doesn't have any connections to Will. Hell, he doesn't have any real connections to Hannibal besides what has been whispered to Will.

He bites his cheek. He doesn't want to live in silence again and he doesn't want Hannibal to get angry like he did again. He doesn't know what he wants to do, but he does know he wants Hannibal, and that is becoming enough for him.

Chapter 13

He’s meticulous. He’s always been calculated, but killing Émile LaBlanc requires a level of planning Will has never executed before. It’s one thing to manipulate a few people who already, foolishly, trust him, to break someone out of a high security prison, it’s another thing to murder someone, leave no evidence (Luckily for him, Hannibal is there, whispering in his ear the details of their plans), and do it all in a way that won't send off red flags to the FBI. Or at least, as few red flags as possible.

It’s inherently impossible that they won’t pick up on at least one thing, but he’s confident in himself. They won’t arrest him, at least, not on one offense. They’ve painted him to be this grand hero, the man who finally took down two of the worst serial killers the modern world has known. No, he doesn’t really care if they know it’s him, none of them matter. The only thing that matters is Hannibal–or, securing their connection. Securing this second chance he’s been given.

Tableau’s are the easiest thing for the two of them to speak through, bypassing all other forms of communication, they can look at these works of art and understand fully what the other is trying to get across. They’re also what this version of Hannibal seems to crave more than anything else, at least that’s what he’s saying, that’s what he implies with every single day Will doesn’t kill, and god he’ll give him anything. The longer he’s alone in that house, the longer he goes with Hannibal in his mind, the more sure he is about doing it.

Despite this, and his reservations on the subject, he knows that Hannibal is still lying to him. He doesn’t know why, but he’s fully aware of it. Maybe he’s killing again because he thinks it’ll make an honest… man out of him. That whatever the lie is, about where he was, what he saw after death, will come out and he’ll confess once he knows Will is fully in. The truth, whatever that means for this version of Hannibal.

He just has to wait for the perfect time.

It comes deep in the fall, mid-October. There’s a copycat of sorts, a very expected sort of thing since the anniversary of Hannibal’s death just crept by. Will sees it on the news first, some odd kills up the East Coast, then they call it what it is. A copycat. He’s trying to emulate Hannibal’s crimes to the best of his abilities, and he’s getting better. It makes sense, anniversaries are common times for people, fans, to commit these sorts of crimes. At least, that’s what Will gets from the news. They don’t give him a name, just calling him a copycat, but he’s sure Freddie Lounds is rifling through lists to find the best one.

He wonders if she’ll come to him, if she’ll want a statement about it. He has a good man to shoot her dead where she stands, but pushes that thought away. Besides, she doesn’t come–or at least, she hasn’t yet.

As nervous as Will is about this kill, he’s already setting his sights on his second victim–the copycat himself–but that’ll come later. He’ll let him get better before he finds him, which won’t be too difficult of a task. This man isn’t nearly as smart as Hannibal, not even a little

bit. He's left footprints, a few brown hairs, and powder from medical grade gloves on the bodies. He comes in through a window, he leaves through the front door. At least, that's what Tattle Crime says, and he's been following the story closely. The news hasn't mentioned it heavily, and Jack hasn't called him.

Maybe that's for the best. It certainly would be easier to find this weak imitation with their help but he knows better than to involve himself again. It'll only hurt the relationship he's trying to cultivate here. It did before.

If this copycat wants to think like Hannibal, he wants to be Hannibal, well, Will can show him how to die like Hannibal.

Worse, Hannibal has started to feed into this – rage? He's not sure what to call what he feels, but he knows it burns him up the way the pastor who exorcized said brimstone would if he didn't cast out the demon rooted in his soul. Maybe that demon is still there, maybe it's always been him.

Part of him still feels like he's living by Hannibal's whims, that he isn't ready to kill again, that this is all some big mistake and he needs to wait. Another part of him knows that he'll never be fulfilled without this, that Hannibal was right, at least a little bit. It's this swirling paradox, his inability to be fulfilled while also being fulfilled by his very existence. He can never be truly happy.

He stands in his yard, looking at the old truck he bought for cash just a week prior. The trip up is planned, albeit longer than necessary as he plans to take back roads for as long as possible so no cameras catch sight of him. He's got two canisters of gas in the bed, a cooler filled with gatorades and ham sandwiches, and Winston is already comfortable in the passenger seat.

Hannibal is beside him, looking at the truck as blankly as he does everything. Giving into this… shell of Hannibal feels blasphemous, but he needs him, in whatever way he can have him. He just has to keep reminding himself of that. It just rubs him wrong, wondering if this is what Hannibal would want, the other Hannibal.

His phone rings, shocking him slightly. Hannibal turns his head to look at him and he immediately puts his hand up to stop what he's about to do.

He only spares it a glance before answering it. "Alana."

"Will." Her voice comes through the speaker crackling. Distantly, he can hear the sound of a child, Morgon, playing.

"I was worried about you. I heard about your divorce. I needed to make sure you were still alive."

"I'm still alive." Will laughs dryly, the cold air hurting his through. Those words settle on him and his gut twists, the feeling of a blade slitting him up, just at saying that. "Despite it all. I'm… I'm alive."

“I don’t mean to pry, I just want you to know if you ever need to talk to anyone, I’m here,” she says softly. “I know this is… such a hard time for you.”

Will takes a breath, eyeing the–man beside him. His voice comes out steady, much more than he was anticipating. “Thanks, Alana, that means a lot.”

“The holiday season is coming up–“

“You’re gonna invite me over, I know, suicide rates are high around Christmas.” Will’s already turning to go back inside the house. “Don’t worry. I’ll be fine. I’ve got Winston, and an old friend is visiting.”

“And it’s your birthday, December’s a busy month.” She waits for him to respond, and when he doesn’t, she continues. “If you’re sure, but the invitation stands. It’ll be nice.”

Not only is he alive, but he’s aging. His birthday last year was spent in a medically induced coma, turning 39 without his knowledge, but this year he’ll be 40. Hannibal would be turning 50, but instead, he’s forever this, forever 48, forever stuck, and slowly Will is catching up, he’s changing without him. Shocking as it is, Will had hardly considered that eventually he’d be old, that one day he’d be older than Hannibal. What then? Can he even fathom that?

“Thanks, give my best to Margot, and little Morgon. Bye Alana.” He doesn’t wait to hear her try to keep him on the phone before he takes the phone from his ear and clicks it off.

For a few seconds, he stands there, hesitating at the steps up to his porch. A lot has happened, his entire life has changed, and thinks about their conversation, about what it all means. The invite was a nice gesture, he can’t deny it, but that isn’t what he wants. Maybe before when he was in the midst of his depression, but not now. So many things have changed; he goes to her contact and deletes it.

Finally, he takes the first step up, ready to leave his cell phone there for the next 24 hours. He sets it down on his counter beside the new, empty urn he’d bought. It’s sleek, with abstract lines across it, and a deep red base. It’s not the typical urn at all. Another thing he needs to do when he gets back, put Hannibal’s ashes in it. (He’s bought three so far, and this is the only one Hannibal has actually agreed upon for his ashes.)

That’s it then. He’s going to go kill this man at Hannibal’s behest. Despite his confusing emotions around it and the desire to wait, he’s going to do this. For them.

Émile LaBlanc is a divorcée, loved within his circle but a horrible womanizer. He has children who seem to ignore him except for special occasions and despite the love online, he rarely goes out anymore. Bad leg, it would seem. He’s snuggly in his 60s and years of living the so-called high life have finally caught up. He isn’t American, having known Hannibal in France when they were both much younger, but somehow ended up in New York, likely due to work. Now he lives there, old and vulnerable with a target on his back.

He’s not a good person and by all accounts, he shouldn’t have made it to his 60s. But neither is Will, and he thinks he might be worse. At least, in different ways. His very existence, the

things Hannibal whispered to him in the dead of night about what Émile has done rubs him raw – he deserves this, and he can't believe Hannibal never killed him.

Will wants him dead, of course, much like he wants a lot of people dead. He wanted Randall Tier dead, he wanted Francis Dolarhyde dead, he wants the copycat dead, he wants Bedelia Du Maurier dead. God, he wants her dead.

"Will," Hannibal says softly. His hand–or the buzzing of what was his hand, tingles across his shoulder.

He blinks, coming out of that thought. "I'm coming."

Winston is sitting in the car, the heat is on, and Will knows that this is it. There's no going back, and a small part of him is happy about it. This was the life he was meant to have, in a way. If Hannibal was alive, but he's alive. He said it himself.

The ride is slow going. Will makes sure to go exactly the speed limit, listening to Hannibal talk on and on about how this is important, how it means something, how it'll save them both. He wonders what Hannibal would talk about if he weren't… whatever this is. Birds, he thinks. Hannibal would talk about birds.

He only stops twice, both times to piss on the side of the tree lined roads and smack on a ham sandwich. Hannibal doesn't follow him (they're testing the bounds of their attachment) and despite the cold outside, the condensed puffs of air in his face, it's not nearly as cold as being next to Hannibal. He tries not to think about that too much.

The rest of the trip he tries to drown Hannibal out with the likes of Johnny Cash. It only helps a little, he was always a talker. Worse in death, he thinks.

There are a few times, when it lulls and the music plays and they just exist together that everything almost feels normal. He can pretend they're going to do this kill together, fully together, or that they're driving up to New York for a trip. A getaway from the lives they have, that they're going to argue about directions or where to eat and the price of gas.

He imagines Hannibal had a house somewhere in New York state, that they'd spend Christmas together there, on a big piece of land, in a house way too big for them – that's okay, he'd fill it with dogs. The snow would be nice, they'd have a real tree and ornaments that are their own. Alana wouldn't have to call and extend an invite to him, because he'd have Hannibal and they would have been happy.

Lost in this thought he goes to take Hannibal's hand in his, jaw twitching when all he gets is the scratchy material of the seat and a bright buzz of the empty space Hannibal's body takes. He jerks his hand away quickly, moving his fingers repeatedly in an attempt to stifle the feeling. Usually he takes it as a comfort, but now he feels ridiculous.

"Could you change the music, Will?" Hannibal asks, not acknowledging Will's slip up.

"I like Johnny Cash," he mumbles.

Hannibal turns his head to look at him, Will doesn't look back. There will be nothing new there to observe. "All you seem to like is Johnny Cash."

Will's hand still tingles and his clothes feel tight but he powers through. "He's one of my favorites. We listen to Chopin all the time, you'll survive."

The rest of the ride goes as follows. Will listens to Johnny Cash, Hannibal complains about Johnny Cash, and Winston tries to sleep through it.

When they get to where Émile lives, he finds it's not really in New York, but rather a patch of land outside of the city. It isn't gated or protected in any way, he sees no cameras in his yard when he goes to scope it out. It's late, and Will wears a baseball cap, shoe insoles, and gloves just in case. It's too easy to slip through a window and make his way up the stairs.

Hannibal is to his right, whispering in his ear the entire time. When did whispering into the chrysalis become so blatant? So much harder to ignore? When did his words crawl into his skin and make a home in him, making him Hannibal's plaything again? Why doesn't he care?

The master bedroom is all the way down the hall, the walls are covered in pictures–not of his children but of his escapades through life. People and trips and shows of wealth. It's unamusing and Will tries not to give any of the pictures the time of day. He's here for one thing and one thing only.

"This one," Hannibal says, calling attention to a picture. He's not walking beside him anymore, instead, looking at one of the pictures on the wall. "We went to Sicily."

Pausing, Will takes a step over in the dark of the hall to squint at the picture. Hannibal is younger in it, pale, hair swept up the same, but darker than he's ever seen it. Beside him is a man, visibly older, with skin prematurely lined by the sun. He squints closer, looking at their hand placements, the way Hannibal looked over at him, his smile. It isn't the same as how he ever looked at Will, less real, but jealousy still flares up in his chest and tries to pull him down.

They could have done those things, they could have gone places, taken pictures, been together. Will imagines as much on the way here. Hannibal has whispered as much to him, and yet they'll never have that. It's all a wasted opportunity, and Émile LaBlanc is a waste of a man.

Finally, Will turns away, face hard pressed in his anger. God is a jealous god, he supposes, and wasn't he made in his image? Even as he creeps down the long hall, he wonders if that's a good way of thinking, if it'll get him anywhere, but he shuts it out. It's too late. He's already here.

This man he's going to kill looks older in person. Years of alcohol, cigarettes, and coke doing a number on him in his old age. He sleeps peacefully, comfortably, unknowing that Will looms over him like a crazed dog.

He wonders what he must have looked like when Hannibal knew him, aside from that one picture, he can't imagine he was ever attractive. How a 23 year old Hannibal could have

found a man closer to 40 than his own age attractive, Will doesn't know. He doesn't want to know, he doesn't want to think, he just wants to feel. He wants to give them both what they've been craving.

Hannibal stands behind him, whispering in his ear. The hairs on the back of Will's neck stand, the room is a freezing hell. He, this man, and the being attached to his soul are all damned creatures and today, just like that day on the cliff, Will is judge, jury, and executioner. He is god, and this man is guilty, and he is guilty, and Hannibal is guilty.

He knows, deep down, that Hannibal suggested this man because it would make Will jealous, that it would make the darkness in him lurch up like legion, and because he was an easy target. He was right, even in this horrid state, he's right.

Will holds the hunting knife in two hands, clasped between his fingers like beads of rosary. This is his Hail Mary, this is his sacrificial lamb, may he bleed and burn for forgiveness. He switches the knife into one hand and in one quick and fluid motion, he slits his throat, the skin coming apart like the veil and bleeding out across his bed.

Émile opens his eyes, hands grabbing at his throat in those few seconds he has left. Above him is the dark figure of a man, his breathing steady, his head tilted as he watches him drain out onto his bed, and behind him a shadow, a great oppressive darkness.

Blood seeps between his fingers and the man tries to speak, but all he can manage is a bloodied gurgle that dribbles down his cheeks before the life leaves his eyes and he stares at him blankly, just like Hannibal does. It should unsettle him; it doesn't.

A quick kill like this copycat he's meant to be mimicking. Will turns to look at Hannibal, and then back at the body in the bed laying in a puddle of its own blood. He works quickly after, using his hunting knife to slit him open from throat to navel, cracking his ribs all the way open, like a burst cage.

Despite what he may want of this, Will is electing to not acknowledge any more of his words. He has to do this for himself just as much as he has to do it for them.

His gloves fingers slide inside the wet cavern of his body, squelching against muscles as he slowly separates them from the body. With his chest open, Will detaches his heart and places it in one of his hands. While he'd prefer to arrange the body more, to give it his full capabilities, to show a real tribute of his love, he knows that there will be others after this. Ones that deserve it more than this man who knew Hannibal, who had Hannibal, 20 years before they met.

The tableau ends up being exactly what he needs it to be. Just shaky enough that it looks like the fledgling killer that has started to capture the headlines. He's certain the copycat will be blamed for this, he followed what he had read on Tattle Crime to a T. He's also certain that it will have the copycat after him.

He takes his kidneys, cutting delicately as not to waste the organ. They're probably less than good, but he doesn't care. This is his reward, this is what gods do–they take, they eat, they swallow.

When he leaves out the front door, with two kidneys in hand, he doesn't feel a sickness, but he does feel an emptiness to it. It was thrilling, exciting, he wants to do it again–he wants to pack hunt again. There is no one he can do that with, no one that he wants to do that with, other than the dead. Other than something that defies logic, something that would get him strapped to that chair, held down by the hands of the elders as he screams for his father. Hannibal can never kill again and Will knows now that he can never fully enjoy killing without him.

He puts the two kidneys in the cooler in the back of his truck and refuels with the canister. The gloves will go with him and they'll burn, along with his shoes, his shirt, his pants. Everything about tonight will have to go, just in case. There's more he needs to do, and a decision he needs to make. One that needs to be made quickly.

Taking the last gatorade from the cooler, he goes to slide back into the truck and send them on their way. It would be good to leave now, they'd probably make it home by lunch, but instead of cranking the truck up he hesitates, and slides back out, leaving Hannibal for only a second before the man appears behind him.

"Will?" He asks, taking on the soft tone he does sometimes, like the good parts of him are breaking through. "There's nothing more to be done."

There's a picture on the wall of a young Hannibal Lecter, a picture that Will is taking. It's a liability, yes, but it also represents something that has been taken from him, something other people had the option of having.

He goes straight up the stairs, avoiding Hannibal's wondering, and removes the picture from the wall. They both stare at it for a long moment, before Will tucks it under his arm and leaves again, walking back down to his truck, and peeling out of the yard without a second glance in that direction.

Unlike the drive up, Hannibal remains uncharacteristically quiet, and Will doesn't speak either. There's nothing that needs to be said now, no doubts that can exist between them. Soon, Will is going to have the truth, soon Will is going to be too much for this shell of Hannibal to handle. Soon Will is going to be too much for himself to handle.

They stop once so Winston can pee, and Will uses that time to top off the truck, but other than that, they drive straight on through until they've come all the way back to Wolf Trap. Tiredness is setting in, the ache of it all, the desire to give up but instead, Will scratches behind Winston's ear and gets them home.

Will unloads the truck from the back of the house so if anyone were to pull up, they wouldn't see him immediately. The empty gas cans are left on his back porch and the cooler is brought in through the back door and into the house. He leaves it by the refrigerator, despite the fact he knows he needs to take the kidneys out and instead goes upstairs to clean himself off.

For once, Hannibal doesn't seem to be watching. Or if he is, he isn't close enough for Will's stomach to flip flop with anxiety. He gives him space, a break from the whispering or the ignoring or whatever else he'll do to get his way. He got it, he doesn't need the bother again–

unless Will doesn't kill in a timely fashion, but he will. He has to knock two other people off his list before the end of the year.

He comes downstairs when he's clean, changed into comfortable clothes. Hannibal is petting Winston absently and finally glances up when Will hits the last step. In hand he has his clothes, his gloves, and the picture from the house. He takes them all out to his burn barrel beside the old wooden barn at the back of his property, Hannibal hot on his heels.

"I don't like he had a piece of you," Will tosses each thing in. "He had it displayed."

Hannibal tilts his head as he watches Will, those dead eyes following his hands as they dispose of their crime piece by piece. "He was old, sentimental."

The picture is laid at the very top, Will stares at it. "I hope I never suffer from the same."

Burning all of that is easy. He's still hazed by what he did. He takes the blowtorch from the barn and they watch everything incinerate, going up into the air as smoke and ash until nothing else remains but a small black pile. They stand there longer.

"Did you enjoy it, Will?" Hannibal asks after an extended period of silence. "Did it compare? You were magnificent."

"I enjoyed it, but it…" He turns back towards the house, his mind going a million miles a second. Old and sentimental keep replying over and over. Hannibal ignoring him, the lying, the fact killing felt good but not as good as he knows it could. How many people can he kill before Hannibal is satisfied? Who does he really want dead?

He comes inside without finishing his statement. Love has teeth, love is demanding, love is staring at him as he splits open the box his ashes are in. The urn won't let him transfer the bag directly into it, the design is too narrow and there are far too many ashes, so he has to find a funnel to do it.

He digs around in the kitchen looking for anything that could work as a funnel, slightly hysterical. Pulling open junk drawers and cabinets, he comes to the refrigerator to feel the top and kicks the cooler, the sound of ice sloshing making him blink and stare down at it. His hand freezes to the top of his fridge as he thinks about what he did just hours before.

There are kidneys in that cooler, and Hannibal cannot eat them, and they are not Hannibal's. Hannibal is a bag of ashes.

He kicks the cooler away and goes back to the urn and ashes, taking the knife he used to open the box and slicing open the top of the bag.

His hands shake, he remembers that the funnel he's looking for is in the bathroom–he'll get it in a minute. Now, he's just staring at this bag, at the contents, knowing what it truly is. Across from him, Hannibal watches, imposing with just his presence alone.

He doesn't know why he opened the bag, or he does, but before he can stop himself, he takes a handful of the ashes, of Hannibal, and eats them. The taste is putrid, the texture is worse,

and tears swell up in his eyes as he chokes them down. Gasping for air once he's swallowed, he cries harder, entire body shaking as he holds himself against the counter, hoping he might not collapse. A buzzing erupts across the back of his neck; he cries harder.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> i can't believe i've been writing this for a whole year that's insane. back in the day when i wrote loki fanfic i used to churn out three updates a week

Will watches Tattle Crime obsessively for news on the death of Émile LaBlanc. He wants to be as ahead of this as possible because there are things that'll start falling into place to set him up for the next kill on his short list. He needs it, he needs to be right, he needs to be better. There is something to prove now, on his knees, pray to a divine god that craves blood – he is David, and he cannot build the temple because god demanded he fight but he can still kill for his god.

It takes Freddie three days after Jack starts calling to post the story, likely because it takes anyone who knows him over five days to find the body, the local cops had to come out, then they had to contact the FBI when they got there, meaning it was hush hush and she didn't find out about it immediately. The house had the heater on when he was there, and hopefully, it helped speed up the process of decomposition.

COPYCAT STRIKES AGAIN! Killer Attempting to Imitate the Infamous Chesapeake Ripper Targets Elderly French Man. (His cheap imitation has improved, the FBI worries that he'll become uncontrollable.)

It settles something in Will. Whoever it is that is trying to be the new Hannibal will see that, they'll see it and they'll know and they'll hate him. They'll want him dead too, although, he supposes it was only a matter of time before they came looking for him, not that he's really hiding.

They'd never understand the parameters of their relationship, to begin with. They'll assume Will hated him, that he killed Hannibal for the sole purpose of killing him, that Hannibal needs to be avenged. He's probably younger than him, charismatic but openly narcissistic. He fakes a god complex but lacks an identity for himself and needs to latch onto others. Why Hannibal though?

The reasons remain endless.

Tonight he's making a slow cooked stew with roughly chopped kidneys in it as his protein, a mix of potatoes and onions, and mushrooms. He adds onions because Hannibal insists, but even as he chops them, he finds himself displeased with the addition.

He bets whatever kid is trying to be Hannibal would balk at the idea that Will gets annoyed when Hannibal makes recipe suggestions.

“He’s going to want to find me,” Will tells Hannibal as he tastes the food. It’s missing something, so he finds a cheap bottle of wine and adds a splash of the liquid to hopefully round out the flavor. “He’ll know it’s me.”

“Will anyone else?” Hannibal asks from where he watches, his voice low, echoing.

Will thinks for a moment and then takes a swig out of the bottle, face twisting at the cheapness of it. “Possibly.”

His phone has been ringing off the hook. Jack has called at least three times in the past hour about this. He listened to the first voicemail, not from today, but from when he most likely first got this body, and that was enough for him to know they want him to work again – or they want to keep an eye on him and that’s the easiest way. It would be too much work to come bug his place, maybe even a bit excessive since Hannibal is dead and there is a copycat on the loose. Of course, on the voicemail, Jack said he’s worried this copycat is going to try and get into contact with Will, but god, he can only hope it’s before the end of December. He doesn’t want to have to find him.

Either way, he’s been ignoring the calls and the texts and he’ll ignore anything else. This isn’t about them anymore. This isn’t about anyone but him and Hannibal.

Molly will be here soon with papers to sign. Not divorce papers, they haven’t been separated long enough for the state of Virginia to do that, but it’s some official paperwork that Will said they could solve without a lawyer and she agreed to it. Just another person this isn’t about anymore.

When the stew seems good and the flavor’s a bit more full, Will takes two bowls from the cabinet and sets them down, spooning them both full. Once he feels like he’s divided it up well, he takes some crunchy bread he bought and slices two pieces off, adding them to the meal.

Hannibal darkens one of the corners, moving between there and the other end of the countertop. “Will you be feeding her?”

“I’ll offer.” Will smiles a little. “I doubt she’ll say no.”

It’s a little less than ten minutes before Molly shows up. She looks good, better than when they were together and she was trying to shoulder all of Will’s not-mourning behaviors. She’s cropped her hair short now, and her face seems less tired, less burdened. This is good, he thinks, for all of them.

They sit at the kitchen table and Will signs everywhere she tells him to. He doesn’t really care, and it doesn’t seem like she wants anything that’s already his. She just wants him to sign to get his name off of a few things. Probably took her a while to get all of that in order.

Once he places the pen down, he looks up at her and smiles. “I made food. That stew you always liked. With the kidneys?”

Molly gives him a look. She isn't here for social hour, and honestly, he doesn't want her to be, but he does want her to try the stew. "I'm not letting you keep partial custody of Wally."

"Listen, I'm… sorry, about how things turned out," he says, "I only want what's best for you and Wally, and it's not me. It's never going to be me. I don't want partial custody, I want him to be fine and normal. It's just stew, a farewell if anything."

Molly's lips purse. "Do you know what kind of damage this is doing to my son?"

"Do you know the kind of damage that will be done to him if he has a father who's mentally unstable? I do." Will swallows strangely. Hannibal is haunting his corner. He thinks about his father, his drunk father screaming at him about god, about the devil, about how his mother wasn't coming to him at night and he was falling into the clutches of Satan. "You'll find a good man, Molls. Someone that deserves you. Someone that can be there for Wally. That isn't me. This is a good thing."

She rubs between her eyes and then nods. "Stew would be good, thank you."

Will picks up the two bowls and brings them over to the table. Traditionally, he'd serve this with white rice and a beer, but he knows if he serves it with rice she won't finish all of hers and he wants her to. Sweet tea will have to do as well, but that's more of a nonissue.

She notices, of course, that it's missing the rice, but thank god she doesn't mention it. It seems like such a random thing, and he's sure she just thinks he forgot to buy some. Not that this is calculated, not that Hannibal Lecter is watching her take spoonfuls of stew with the chopped up kidneys of a dead man into her mouth.

The conversation between them is far more gentle than Will could've expected. They talk about Wally's school, how he's adjusting (well, all things considered), her new job, the church Wally likes. It's all very normal, and Will has a suspicion that she was always aware of how well he knew Hannibal, or, she figured it out when he became a shell of himself after his death. Either way, she seems less angry with him than before. Not that he cares, but it feels good having one less person to have to answer for.

"We were good," Molly says softly once she finishes her food. "Maybe not–long term, but I think we were–"

Hannibal snatches Molly's hair. There isn't enough time for Will to do anything about it, to even comprehend that he's moved before he snatches her hair so hard back that she nearly falls from her chair.

"I…" Will looks at him, at the blurry edges of him. He doesn't check Molly as she grabs the back of her head, frightened. He just stares at Hannibal. At that unforgiving, jealous god in his eyes.

She stands suddenly, eyes wide and shocked. She looks at Will, like it's the first time she's ever seen him. Maybe Molly's staring straight through him, maybe she tastes death on her lips like Will had for weeks after he woke up from that coma and could still taste Hannibal's cold lips.

They weren't good. He isn't a good person. He's haunted, he always has been. He was before he killed Hannibal, he is now.

"Hey, listen–" Will tries, but Molly is already out of the door. Is she running? He doesn't know, he's looking at Hannibal.

The room is silent and he hears her car peel out of his yard.

Slowly, he picks up their bowls and takes them to the sink. He drops them down, they clink, and he starts the water like he might wash them before turning it off and facing Hannibal. "Why would you do that?"

"She was overstaying her welcome." Hannibal shakes his head. That righteous anger has dissipated, and now all that remains is that ghostly form he's come to love. "She wants you back.

"That was fucking uncalled for," Wills argues, crossing his arms. His entire body shakes, sick with annoyance at his actions. "She doesn't want me back. Even if she did, I don't want her."

"She's your ex wife for a reason, Will. There is no reason she should be staying for dinner." Hannibal runs his hands over the suit he wears. "That was uncalled for."

"We were just having a conversation." Will scrubs a hand over his face so roughly he sees stars behind his eyelids. "If you don't recall, I left her for you. I gave up everything I had there for you. I'm–I have so much more to give but you want me isolated just like in life. I am isolated, Hannibal. I'm alone here. All I have is you and Winston."

"Don't you crave touch? Warmth? Someone who hasn't seen what lies beyond it all?" Hannibal's voice raises slightly, the most it has since their blasphemous reunion. "Did you not kill me because you wanted a normalcy I couldn't give you?"

"Don't do that," Will whispers, stricken.

"What?" Hannibal looks at him and if his face could hold anything but that barren look, he thinks he'd been taunting him.

"You know it was supposed to be both of us." Will shakes his head, anger and grief rising up in his throat, ready to choke him. "You know I wanted to be with you."

"It was not though, was it, Will?" Hannibal asks, the lights flicker and Winston moves from where he's lying on the couch to hide under the coffee table. "You went home to your wife and child and I–came back to you."

Will steps forward, horrified with himself, with Hannibal. They are both beasts, the beast, marked. Blasphemous and sinful, full of pain. Hannibal cannot cut him open with a knife so he has to with his tongue, gushing evil.

"What did you see?" Will asks, crowding him farther from the table. "Tell me."

"Nothing." Hannibal steps back a bit, instinctively.

“What did you see!” Will screams, slamming his hand flat against the table. It shakes and one of the chairs falls from the force. “Tell me right now what the fuck you saw or I’ll fucking turn myself in and let them medicate me until I don’t even know that you’re there anymore.”

For less than a second, Hannibal’s face morphs into something unrecognizable. He’s always looked particularly dead, but there is rot there. Ocean salt and soaked skin and blue veins and drips of water that fall from his skin and hit the hardwood floor. Will hardly remembers what his body looked like that night, but that’s it. That was it.

His eyes cut into him, ready to hurt him more. “My sister… she held out her hand to me. She asked me to come with her.”

Is that the truth? Will doesn’t know. He can’t ever be sure, but if it is… he doesn’t know how to cope with that. In no world does he believe Hannibal would choose him over his sister, but the idea that he might is comforting.

“Hannibal…”

“Maybe I should have.” He moves past Will, through him, causing his entire body to light up horribly, taking away that moment from Will.

If he could now, he would. If he could change it all he’d take her hand and he’d go and– would he ever wait on Will? Is he worth it? He has to be, Hannibal’s just trying to hurt him. He just wants to see his reaction. That’s all, at least, that’s what Will tells himself.

Standing there, staring at the wall, Will feels his stomach turn uncomfortably. “I can’t… fuck you. Maybe you should’ve. Is this what we’re gonna be forever? Is this what you want? If you don’t want to wait on me then fine. I was alone before, I can be alone again.”

He wipes his eyes quickly before turning to head for the stairs. His entire body feels weird after Hannibal’s little stunt, and he doesn't know how to make it stop. Override the bad with something good, he guesses. Self-soothe. Anything to make that strangeness go away before he starts to pick at his skin.

“I want you,” Hannibal says when Will makes it up a few of the stairs.

Will pauses, his throat tight, his voice quivering. “You have me.”

Hannibal looks up at him and in his face he sees a young man. Not a man Will has ever known, but someone that he thinks he might, one day. He goes to touch his crucifix and then stretches his fingers repeatedly when he remembers it’s gone.

“This is not how I want you,” Hannibal admits.

Will goes upstairs, ignoring Hannibal’s request. He knows how he wants him, and he won’t lie and say he hasn’t thought about it as the Holidays get closer, as his birthday gets closer too. Still, there’s too much to do, and asking that of Will right now is selfish. More selfish than is good for Hannibal to be.

Once he gets into his bedroom he shuts the door and locks it. It's quick work getting out of his clothes and throwing them into the hamper, letting himself lay over the comforter nude.

Ridding himself of his clothes helped that feeling Hannibal instilled in him but it's still deep in him. How could he do that to him? Touching him in such a horrible way, say those horrible things to him, after everything he's done. Of course, none of it is really lost on him, but somehow, someway, it hurts worse coming from this Hannibal.

If anything would really make him feel better, it would be a stiff drink, but that would require him to go back downstairs and he can't imagine facing Hannibal right now. He can't imagine facing anyone at all. His phone is down there, Hannibal, Winston. For one second he just wants to be fine, to be okay, to have Hannibal and not fight to prove something. He wants him to stop demanding for just one day.

He looks at the urn that has made its way to his bedroom. There's no reason why he would feel that way, there's nothing to be done at all. He needs to stop feeling, to stop thinking.

He touches himself, gentle fingers over his hardening cock. Self-soothing and a way to just stop all thinking, even if just for a few minutes.

He wraps a hand around himself and slowly pumps his hand over himself, the dry friction enough to empty his head as precome starts to bead at the tip. Quickly, he brushes his thumb over the liquid, trying to slick his way back down as easily as possible.

"Will?" The door opens and Hannibal stands there. He's dressed in a dark gray sweater and slacks. There's a lingering smell of wine and if he listens, he can hear the ocean, like he's put his ear to a seashell. His hair is cropped short, shorter than he's seen it in a long time. "Are you okay?"

Will sighs, his hand pausing. His lip trembles as he looks at him, and he fights to get any words out. "Leave me alone, Hannibal.

Hannibal comes into the room anyway, shutting the door behind him so gently Will doesn't hear it click. Even in the darkness, Will can tell his eyes are alive again, his skin isn't so pale, he doesn't smell like death and an anger he can't uproot.

"I want us to be okay," Hannibal whispers in the darkness and begins to undress before crawling on top of Will, his warm lips pressing kisses against his skin as he slides down onto him, burying him deep inside his warm cunt. "I just want to be with you."

For a moment they sit like that, and Will clings to him, burying his face into his neck as he holds him flat against him. Their hearts beat in sync, their bodies one. They should've always been one, their souls are, their stories are.

Will touches his sides, feeling every inch of skin he can. They move against each other and Hannibal kisses his neck, whispering in his ear, promising him things that can't possibly be true. *They're okay, they're fine. This is all just a bad dream.*

“I love you,” Hannibal says into his skin, kissing where the words are spoken as if to seal it into him. “I have always loved you, Will.”

So much of him has wanted Hannibal to say that to him. His Hannibal. How much could’ve changed if they were just up front? If they never played that game? But they did, they did play it, and there’s nothing that can change that now. He doesn’t believe it was destiny, that some god decided it for them, but their own folly. If they’ve committed sins, they’ll have to answer to each other.

“I love you, Hannibal.” Will moans, digging his fingers into his skin so hard he knows it has to break skin. “I love you.”

Hannibal transforms on top of him. He can’t see him, but his skin becomes a mix of feathers and leather. He feels the same leathery-ness against his neck, the antlers that grow from his head cage him against the bed and Will stares into the large black eyes of Hannibal, into his monstrous face.

If there is a god, he knows he’s seen him. He knows he’s not the version of Hannibal that came back for him–he’s the version waiting on him somewhere else. He’s the pieces that couldn’t make it back to this plane of existence, he hopes he’s saving him a place.

Will digs his fingers into him even harder, trying to get bits of flesh and blood under his nails as his breath catches and comes deep inside of him. If he could, he’d bite into his flesh and swallow it, but he doesn’t really want to. He just wants to hold him a little while longer. It’s all he wanted on that cliff. On that beach.

As he slowly catches his breath, he glances back up to where Hannibal had been. All that he’s left with is an empty room and his softening cock in his hand. There’s no blood under his nails.

Laying there feels like hell. Everything feels like hell – if not being able to touch Will is Hannibal’s personal hell, then living must be Will’s. Though, he isn’t sure what he expected. The universe had to punish him. His throat catches, his chest trembling, and he feels tears soak his hair.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

sorry i abandoned y'all like a bad dad

The days that pass from his dream of sex, of holding Hannibal, of being buried deep inside of him, are long and disjointed. The thoughts of it have become so confusing that at times he wonders if it was real, or if anything that has happened is real. What has he done to himself, ripping himself open, feeding the parts of him unfit for even a butcher to the man he loves.

Will stays in his bed, under the blankets like he might hide from some evil beast hiding in his closet. Tucking his head and feet so he can't be snatched away into the darkness that surrounds him. He hardly eats and eventually strips down to just his boxers. His teeth have a film over them and it doesn't take much to know he's in need of a shower. He's putrid, likely unrecognizable to anyone who has known him. The most he does is get up to feed Winston, let him out, and then go back to the safety of his bed.

It reminds him of his time mourning Hannibal, how good Molly was to him, never demanding, never forcing, how he took her for granted – not because he was unappreciative, but because she was too good to him and he didn't want her. Not like he wanted Hannibal. It reminds him of the days he rotted in their shared bed, dreaming of what he and Hannibal could have been if he hadn't tried to kill them, if he had just let them both sink to the bottom of the ocean floor and die together. They could be anywhere now, or nowhere at all. Instead, they're stuck in his little house in Wolf Trap, with the pressure of a copycat and the knowledge that this isn't the life either of them wants. Not really.

If he could, he'd stay like this forever, he thinks. Hidden away, ignoring Hannibal, ignoring the truth they both know is nearing. He knows he has to get up eventually, but there's something comforting about sinking into the bed like he tried to the ocean. It feels like rotting, like he might melt into the sheets and become something new, bacteria and fungi and food for flies. It feels good; it feels right.

Still, he has a job. Clients. (Not that he needs the job, that money from the FBI isn't going anywhere. At least, not until the divorce is settled) And most importantly, Hannibal has begun to pester him – maybe that isn't the right word. He stands at the end of the bed, freezing out the room and burning his nose with sulfur, and watches him. It's weird, disconcerting, and overall annoying. It's all he can do to ignore him, but Hannibal is so determined to get under his skin that Will half believes he'll crawl into his body and live under his hypodermis. That he's planning it, some sort of possession.

There's no privacy, not that he has had any for over a year now, even when he wasn't aware of it. His lack of privacy has permeated through every wall in this house, it has become

something he is so aware of that he believes he may never have had privacy before. Not once, not even when he was alone, before Hannibal, before the FBI. Something has been watching him. Something is still watching him. Maybe replaced by the FBI, by this copycat, by his ex-wife, by every random man at gas stations who believes he's some corn fed, beer sick, American made hero. It's there–is it his mother?

Repeatedly he tries to rid himself of these thoughts. He's becoming paranoid, more than he was before. It's all Hannibal's fault too, if he thinks about it. Isn't everything his fault? Isn't he a problem? The problem. Standing at the foot of his bed like a beast in the night, screech owls calling for his demise, a raven come to tap. Whatever was there before, all that remains is Hannibal to consume it.

Some nights, when Hannibal stares, he wishes that exorcism would've worked. God, he'd love to be cursed with survivor's guilt alone, but not this destructive feeling that not only did he survive, the person who didn't knows. They know and they remind him every single day. This knowledge that he did something wrong. That he caused Hannibal to be *wrong*.

Seven days is all it takes for him to crawl out of his bed and into the shower. On day two he started to feel grimy and Will's never liked to feel dirty; it made him feel bone-weak and angry, but his own sadness weighed more than his need to be comfortable and he sat, he lets himself grow so uncomfortable that he wishes Hannibal might actually crawl under his skin, only because it would feel better than this.

The warmth of the shower brings him back to reality, mostly. He can feel the layers of sweat and grime washing away as he scrubs his skin so hard it's red and raw and fresh. His hair has to be meticulously pulled apart, knots having formed despite how still he lay in the bed, and when he can't comb through it with his fingers, he rips them in frustration. The pain more bearable than the task.

Once he feels he's clean enough, like his skin is tender enough and his hair has been worked through, he gets out, dries off, and changes. Just into fresh boxers and a t-shirt but it makes a world of difference on his mental state (or, he thinks it's does). That makes tackling the task of brushing his teeth and then trimming his beard bearable and by the end of it, he's feeling more himself.

Not that he is himself. Not that he's been himself in a long, long time–but he looks himself and that has to count for something.

Ever so slowly, he comes down the stairs. Winston is lazing about the house and Hannibal's taken to watching TV. Despite his unblinking staring, he hasn't gotten Will to budge and they are… certain he can't leave Will's side, or at least, whatever building he's occupying so he has had to sit here with Winston, entertaining himself with what he can. How lonely of an existence this must be.

"Hey," he says, voice hoarse from disuse. He tries for nonchalance but sounds far smaller than he expected.

Hannibal glances up at him for a moment. He reeks of sulfur, more than he ever has and it makes Will wonder if he could get him into the shower. If that would even do anything. Then,

briefly, he thinks of salt and covered mirrors.

Standing, waiting, Will watches Hannibal for a long time before realizing that he's refusing to speak. His reason isn't from disuse. Even now he's choosing to be petty, to make Will pick everything up despite everything. He's become so draining, so forceful. He's his Hannibal, the one of his creation, and Will doesn't envy god. He too would condemn his creations to Hell if they were this volatile.

"We can't help but fight, maybe it's destined, but I don't like it." He walks through the kitchen first. Some of the items in his refrigerator are still good, but the only thing he reaches for is a bottle of cheap beer. "I want us to figure this out. I need this to… make sense. I'm tired."

"There's nothing to figure out," He says, his tone so chilled it rips through Will. "You asked, I told you. You couldn't handle the truth."

"I don't know what's the truth anymore. You're dead, I think some parts are more than others. Fragmented maybe." Will shakes his head and comes to sit close to him. "I can't make sense of this. You're still lying to me. You can't be honest, even if you try."

"Life is uncertain, as many Christians will tell you, tomorrow is not promised." Hannibal's eyes don't sway from the TV. He has no desire to give Will what he wants with ease, but when has he ever? "If I lie to you, perhaps you deserve as much. Haven't we always communicated through riddles and lies?"

"My father used to say that. He told me that when they–there were no demons in me but he was so sure that they needed to get them out. We aren't promised tomorrow." Will reaches out to touch him, allowing for the tingling of his form to shoot up through his arm. On the cliff, he felt that Hannibal's arms were his home and his tomb, but now he realizes that his tomb was somewhere he had known longer. "I'm tired, Hannibal. I don't want to keep doing this with you. Please, don't make me."

There's silence again. Will's ears ring from the sound of the TV, from all the electric buzz throughout the house. It's all background noise, something meant to make his life appear more normal, though he doesn't think it ever could. Not anymore. It's all distractions now, shades and shades of it.

"I just know I needed you," Hannibal admits, and it must burn for him to do that, words like embers up his throat. Honesty has never been his forte, it must be worse now. Harder. Given what he's become. "I knew I couldn't be… there without you."

"I don't know if I want that metaphorical tomorrow. I know I want you, and I know I can't have you like this." Will clears his throat. His eyes burn for a moment but he's out of tears to shed, he has nothing left to give but a desperate emptiness that forms between them like terror shapes in the night. "This isn't sustainable. We never were but at least we had each other."

"I want you to do what must be done, and then I want you to be with me. I came here so you'd know." Hannibal looks at him finally, his wide, dead eyes boring into him but Will

doesn't flinch. "I didn't go with her, I couldn't have gone with her. Not without you."

That hits Will strangely, catching in his throat and chest with a stickiness that threatens to choke him.

"I will be with you. After all the loose ends are tied up. I plan to do it all before the end of December." Will scrubs his face so hard he sees stars when he blinks. "I think a piece of me is there too."

"Good," Hannibal tells him seriously.

He must know that a piece of him is wherever Hannibal is. Somewhere else, somewhere distant. He wonders if he can feel it, if it's warm there, if they could be happy there.

"Bedelia's next. Unless the copycat comes here first but I'm sure he's busy planning." Will clears his throat, indicating his unwillingness to continue down the conversation about the next few weeks. "He had to have hated what I did. He'll want me dead."

"Life is a fickle thing, Will. So easily taken. You cannot die at the hand of my cheap imitation." Hannibal isn't reassuring him, he's telling him. He can't die, it would be too anticlimactic for him.

"I know but…" He shakes his head, sinking into the couch and drinking – he forgot he had a beer. "*My* cheap imitation needs to die."

"You fantasized about killing me. Now her." Hannibal tilts his head. "When will your fantasies end?"

"Killing you was just a serpent's trick. Her death is more than a fantasy for me. I can't be with you until it's done." Will brings the lip of the can to his mouth, thinks about finish it off in one fell swoop. "I can't have unfinished business."

Hannibal smiles, mouth pulled tight around the corners. Will's stomach lurches. "I knew you would come around, what I desire and you desire have never been so far out of line."

Will nods then. All that's left is for him to plan and set it into motion, or finish the bits of planning he has left, that is. It only takes a handful of days for him to locate Bedelia at all; she had been smart about his warning, but not smart enough. Hiding so close, wanting the comfort oh familiarity. Still, he waits. He has more that has to happen before he can know the pleasure of taking her life. He has to time it perfectly, once she's found they'll know it was him. He needs to be a step ahead of the FBI.

December approaches, sneaking up on him like a thief in the night. The days he wasted wasting away in his bed could've been used to solidify his plan, but he's inching closer to his 40th birthday and each passing second to that moment causes a bitter sickness to settle in his stomach that makes any flaws in what he's planning moot.

It's hours before the change of months before he takes the number left for him, one he wasn't sure he'd ever use and punches it into his phone with more force than is good for it. It rings

twice, no more, no less, before he hears the click of the receiver on the other side.

His mind is made up, it has been for days, maybe weeks. She must know that. She must've known when she came to see him. His fate was sealed the moment he tipped them over the cliff.

"Will," Chiyoh says cautiously. She's been dreading this call. Good.

"Listen, I know this… I need you to do something for me." He's walking around his house. The heater doesn't matter so he leaves it off. It would be a waste of electricity to run it since Hannibal's coldness has started to stretch throughout the entirety of the house.

The line is silent for a moment. "Why would I do something for you?"

"Because you know what I'm going through. You're the only person who knows." Will watches Hannibal who in turn, watches him. "You're the only person who ever understood."

"I don't owe either of you anything. My debt to Hannibal is paid." Chiyoh tells him, trying to sound disinterested, disconnected. Even for Chiyoh this seems to come as a challenge. "I did as he bid, and unlike you, I did not make a vow of death."

"If you felt that way you wouldn't have left me your number," Will accuses. "I need you to take Winston for a while. That's all."

Winston's head perks up and he comes to bump his head against Will, begging for pets which he gladly gives. He's a good dog, Will wants to say, loyal to a fault. You'd never know a better companion. Then he hesitates, stops himself, wondering if he means Winston at all.

"Your dog." She sounds almost confused.

What had she expected? Will doesn't want to ask, he doesn't care to. It isn't apart of his plan.

"Yeah. Something's gonna happen soon. I pissed someone off and I've had a dog hurt before. Just take him and if anything happens to me, you can have the house." Will promises her. "I'll get it all written out and everything. You and as much of the FBI money as I can give you."

"You shouldn't let him get into your mind like that," Chiyoh warns. She's abandoned the disinterest she was aiming for completely.

"He's not." Will insists and coughs.

"Everyone who has loved him and he has loved is required to kill someone. Someone they love to prove that they can be what he believes them to be. Hannibal requires great sacrifice." Chiyoh says, "What have you been asked to sacrifice?"

It makes him defensive suddenly. Has he always been so easily perturbed by others? He thinks so, but maybe not this outwardly. An ugly sort of anger burns up his throat, threatens to consume him, but he's forced to swallow it back down before he ruins this.

“We all know that, and I’m going to do something,” Will leans down to scratch behind Winston’s ear. He shouldn’t have stopped, he needs to love on him as much as possible. “*Please*, Chiyoh.”

There’s a long silence again, the sound of something. He wonders how long it’ll take her to get here, though he suspects she’s been watching him.

“In a day,” then she asks more directly this time, “Who is he asking you to kill, Will?”

He cringes a bit, the anger is there but he keeps it tapped far down in him. He can be angry about this later, but not now. Not when it matters far too much for him. Losing this, losing his one tether into the outside world would ruin everything he’s worked on. “Just please come get Winston. He’s very well behaved.”

The line is silent. She takes her time about it, she likes to do that, but they’re forced to live in this silence. It consumes them both. Hannibal consumes everything, he thinks. She must think it too.

“Okay,” she says finally, sighing, clearly unhappy but not willing to fight him.

Smiling a little, he ruffles the top of Winston’s head. Relief comes over his whole body, settling him down. “Thank you.”

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> every time i feel bad about my place in the fandom i update this fic o_O torturing will graham is my therapy

The pain he feels when Chiyoh comes to get Winston is palpable, so strong and damning that his chest clenches up and every muscle in his body tries to fight against it. He can't fathom it. He can't fathom *this*. But there are worse things, he knows, horrible things to come and Winston needs to be safe. He needs to be taken care of, and for the first time in years, Will knows he can't be the owner he wants to be. That was a hard pill to swallow, just like when he realized he could never be the father he wanted to be. He was too much like god in that way, turning his back on his children, creating and killing.

She refuses to come inside even when Will offers her a cup of coffee and while Hannibal stands on the porch, Will can't find it within himself to blame her. For all the things Hannibal was to her, he was family. All the family she may have left and Will took that and now he's… something else. Something different. And that something different has started to wriggle its way into Will, growing up in his ribs like roots, like sin. Soon he'd be nothing, soon he'd be damned to Hell.

That was just the way it was, he knows that. He should've already been there, but he's standing in the cold air just a few feet from Chiyoh. She looks older, tired. He must look the same because when she lays her eyes upon him, she grimaces.

"You should be smarter than this, Will," she tells him in way of greeting. "You could be if you wanted to be."

Chiyoh means well. She's a tough love kind of woman – not that anything she feels for him is near love, but she doesn't want this version of Hannibal to take him down. Who would that benefit? Who would win in that situation?

Will feels like he knows. There's something, there has to be, and even if that something is this little house in Wolf Trap. He needs to know and he needs to be right.

"I know what I'm doing." He hands her a bag. It has Winston's toys, the blanket he sleeps with, two bowls (food and water respectively), and three large bags of cooked chicken and rice with instructions on how to make it in the future. Everything they need to ensure he has a great start with her. "I've known for years."

She shoulders the bag. Her features are pinched. "Love doesn't have to be pain."

Will purses his lips. He knows that, better than anyone, but what does it matter what love *doesn't* have to be when he lives every single day with a deep thorn in his side? Molly had been easy, even if he didn't love her right, that was the easiest love he ever received. His love with Hannibal is painful, it rips him open and leaves him bleeding. It's always been this way, and if he doesn't do this, it always will be.

They may be family but she doesn't get it. She'll never get it. Not really. She's seen glimpses, accepted what she's been shown but this? God, this is something else entirely. He's doing her a favor by giving her a clean parting.

"What is love if you aren't suffering in it?" Will glances over his shoulder at the house, at what's left of the man he's giving everything up for. "Thank you for this, you don't know how much I appreciate it."

"Have you been out of the house?" She eyes him as if her questions might save him, like it may put some sense into his head to hear. "We could call someone. Many religions know of ways to sever these sorts of attachments. It could work."

Will shakes his head. Different ideas pop into his mind, stories he heard in Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, the Great Lakes. People and their ways of getting rid of the dead, of ghosts, of demons. People swore by their ways. Salt around windows, blue doors, sheets over mirrors, herbs, spices, oils. You name it, he heard it, and most importantly, his father believed it.

His throat jumps. "You know I'm not doing that, besides, I've had my fair share of that already. I don't need no more religion."

Could an exorcism help? He imagines a faceless pastor coming into his home, dressed in black, dribbling Holy Water in places it doesn't belong, praying over Hannibal's half-eaten ashes. He sees Deacons and Elders following behind him, their haughty eyes judging him. They wouldn't say it but he'd know what they were thinking. Unnatural behavior causes unnatural attachments. They'd lay hands on him, pray over him, demand the beast leave this place. The thought makes his skin crawl and his stomach go weak.

What has religion ever done for him?

"Will," her voice is sharp. "Hannibal has controlled all of our lives. Will you let him control yours, even in death?"

"My mom was like him. Maybe not… exactly but she was there." He doesn't know why he's telling her this, but he has to. He needs her to understand. "I let her go because I was scared. I can't do that again."

She's unhappy with his answer, but she knows she can't do anything to change it. This is his choice, always has been, always will be and nothing she says matters now. His mind is made up, not like that night on the cliff. He won't be fickle now, there's no point. Fickleness has only ever hurt him. This is what he has to do. This is what's good for him, for Hannibal, for everyone.

Will crouches down and scratches behind Winston's ear. Dogs are empathic creatures, something he knows so well. He tilts his head, whimpering. Will's chest seizes up and his eyes burn.

"Hey buddy," he says softly, like maybe he can understand him and maybe he does. His tail doesn't wag, he doesn't go to lick him. "You're going away now, somewhere nice. I won't see you again, I don't think. You be good for Chiyoh, okay? Be a good boy."

Everything feels heavy. It always has, but this feels so much more than that. Letting Winston go is good, he knows that, but as his fingers run through his fur, he can't help but cry. The tears drip down his cheeks and Winston licks his face finally. He must know this is goodbye, but Will laughs and runs his hands up and down his neck.

"Yeah," he clears his throat. "I know you'll be good. What am I worried about?"

When he stands, Will and Chiyoh shake hands. It's the realest contact with another person he's had in what feels like years and he knows it'll be the last soft touch he ever does. That's fine with him, what better person to have it with.

"I'm getting everything squared away with my lawyer," Will says finally. "The house is yours."

Chiyoh gives his hand a squeeze before she lets him go, something of reassurance but neither of them speaks on it. "I suppose it'll do for the price of caring for your dog."

"How many people are giving you houses?" He laughs, a horribly punched out sound. "You couldn't ask for a better dog, I promise."

Chiyoh's lips tighten. "I could have any number of houses."

That's enough of a goodbye for them. She hooks Winston up on his leash and takes him over to her car. He gets in, tail wagging, waiting for Will to come too. A cold wind hits him, it pulls him forward a step. He stands, watches, as his last piece of this life disappears down the drive and he does nothing to stop it.

They'll be good for each other, he doesn't doubt it, but the emptiness in his chest isn't filled by that thought. His house is empty now, save him and Hannibal – the pieces of Hannibal, that is. There's nothing, he's on the final steps, where he should've been over a year ago, and he has less now than he did then.

Maybe that's what he needed. To have nothing but him and Hannibal.

He goes back, heavy footsteps crunching the grass under his feet. He passes him on the porch without a word. Who is really haunting this house? Who is the real dead man walking?

He kicks his boots off and hangs up his jacket. The house is cold and silent. Without the click of nails against the hardwood floor and the excited yips from dogs, Wolf Traps feels less and less like a house. It's a tomb. It always has been, he just didn't know it until now.

“Chiyoh will take good care of him,” Hannibal offers as they pass through to the living room. “And he will do the same in return.”

Will nods, almost throwing himself down onto the couch. Even this feels like a terribly heavy task. “I know.”

The two are like ends of magnets. Bumping off of each other, never quite touching. Will was that kid who forced his magnets together as a kid. He’s doing that now too, but old habits die hard. He just hates that he has to. That they’re so removed from one another. That this could be Hell for them both and not at all. Whatever god is out there is cruel, spiteful, and lives off of the suffering of his creations.

At least what Hannibal made was beautiful. At least he knew what it meant to be an artist.

Hannibal comes over and sits next to him. They’re inches apart but the hairs on the back of his neck stand and his left side buzzes. The last year of his life is pressing down, down, down on him and it’s only intensified by the feeling or, rather, the non-feeling that is Hannibal’s body beside him. The fact that he has to kill Bedelia. Petty, stupid Bedelia only adds to it. It’s pressing him into the couch, it wants him to suffocate.

Hannibal’s dead and she thinks she’s safe, she thinks Will is too pussy to kill her. That he’ll leave her alone. She let her name get posted on the internet again, and came out of hiding as if to taunt Will. He always hated her, and through all of the heavy, all of the destruction, he knows he’s going to enjoy killing her. If it’s the last thing he does, he knows she has to die.

As for her ideas of him, that he isn’t strong enough to come out of hiding and kill her, she’s wrong. She’s never been more wrong in her life and that’s honestly sad, if he’s willing to admit it. Perhaps she thought she was wrong about Hannibal or their relationship, but this error will be the one that costs her the life she clings to so desperately. He has nothing left to lose and she has everything.

Then there’s the copycat, wherever he is. Maybe that’s been Will’s paranoia this whole time about being watched. Maybe he *is* being watched, and not by Freddie Lounds. No, but something else, something that wants to be Hannibal. Something that he thinks hates him for killing him. He doesn’t have that planned out yet, and honestly, he’s not really planning how he might kill Bedelia. He wants to really feel it in the moment.

“Everything will be fine now,” Hannibal tells him and the scent of sulfur is engulfing him like the river he was baptized in as a child. It pulls him from his thoughts and he glances over at Hannibal.

This is what Lot’s wife must’ve felt as she turned to a pillar of salt. It must’ve been horrible and lonely. He wonders what her last thought had been. If someone, across thousands of years, they would have the same one.

“I wish I could hold you. I wish I could kiss you like I did on the beach.” Will scrubs his face, the tears from before are coming back. He wants to tell him that nothing is fine, that he should’ve let them die together, that he hates him, that he loves him, that he doesn’t think this Hannibal, ghost of demon or neither, understands what their love was really like. He doesn’t

though. Instead, he sighs, wet and tired, and says, “I wish I wasn’t a coward. I hate the taste of death. I hate the taste of *your* death.”

“You aren’t a coward, Will. You are only spurred on by the knowledge of death and what you are becoming.” Hannibal’s voice is the softest it’s been. It comforts him. “You’re going to prove it to yourself soon.”

He sinks deeper into the couch, decay has reached the very marrow of his bones. None of this is okay, but there’s nothing else. It has to be this.

“After, when it’s over, we’ll be together?” They have to be but Hannibal doesn’t answer. Whether to avoid lying or avoid telling the truth. Whichever it is, Will doesn’t pry. He doesn’t think he wants to know.

“When I kill Bedelia, I want you to watch,” he says instead. “Please, I want you to enjoy it.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Hannibal replies just as softly as before. “I always knew watching you kill her would be one of the greatest pleasures I would ever experience. Even now, it will be.”

“And the copycat.” Will shakes his head in disgust at the voyeurism of it. “He’ll be watching, he’ll see.”

He’ll have his own punishment. It’s coming, each day Will waits for him and each day he draws a bit closer.

Hannibal stares at him, his dead eyes burrowing through his skin like he may be able to see the blood and bone and muscle beneath it all. Does he still hunger for it? “I think he has been watching for a long time.”

Will sinks his teeth into his lip. Yes, he thinks so too.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

i feel very normal coded about this chapter :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A body pops up, burned and brittle, 30 minutes from Will's house. It's the copycat, it's a sign aimed directly at him. A message. A promise. He infringed or better yet, he's finally gotten his attention (has the copycat always wanted his attention? He must.) Will knows it just by seeing it on the news and hearing the whispers when he goes to the gas station. Everyone's… concerned to say that least. They all just live too close to Will.

Jack knows it too. He calls again and again and again, not his cellphone but the house phone. He leaves voicemails, he asks Will to watch himself right now. He needs Will, he wants Will to be safe, but every time the phone rings he looks at Hannibal and remembers what's important. What he's given up everything for.

Maybe it's blasphemous, but there's something else – something more. They could be more. They could be happier. They will be. This… whatever this version of Hannibal that exists to torment him, that exists in a personal Hell is, it isn't the one he deserves. It isn't his Hannibal. He's a punishment, cruel and wrong but true. Changed, but there's something more. Something else. Will just has to get there. They're above god in that way; he can tell it each passing day, especially since Winston was taken in, that he's closer to something… divine.

Sadness still clings to him like an ill fitting second skin but at least he knows it'll end soon. It's just one little step at a time before all of his suffering is finally over. He has to keep reminding himself of that–and this is one of those steps. He's so close, and even if he gets there by the skin of his teeth alone, that's enough.

He's been dreaming of Hannibal's skin, the warmth of it, the taste of his mouth (even if all he swallows down is crematorium ash), how he could be. How they could be. What they should've been – alive, dead, reborn.

The crucifix necklace he still grabs for leaves impressions on Hannibal's chest, prints of Jesus mark his tanned skin like it had Will's when he was a boy. Jesus tries to invade the soul through the skin but even he can't pass through the flesh. In his dreams, he knows where he's meant to be. Ocean and bone and blood sink him into layers of the Deep. There's horror there, there's love – he cannot escape the blood on his tongue, Jesus between his fingers, or the teeth in his neck.

Now, outside of the safe expanse of his mind, his fingers run over the chain. It tingles like Hannibal goes, almost a burn, and he thinks maybe he's allergic to silver. Maybe he always

has been, maybe his father was trying to keep something *in* rather than keeping it out.

Anger flairs, hot and acrid, in his chest at the mere thought of his father. Will has hated many people throughout his life. His father was the first. For him it's so easy to hate, he wishes it wasn't. That horrible little feeling has lived in him, even as a boy when he knew that it would very well lead to his eternal damnation – he supposes now that the hatred in his heart, that eeks through his blood, is not what's going to send him to Hell. Still, it seems to fill him.

The person he hates more than anything now, who he has hated for years, is Bedelia Du Maurier. It rivals the very hatred he felt and still feels for his father. These feelings for her haven't waned in her absence from his life, and he suspects, even in her death and his, he'll still hate her. Something this serious, this deep in him cannot be so easily uprooted by trivial things like death. After all, it didn't work for his father. She represents destruction to him, not unlike what Molly represents to Hannibal. A destruction that needs to be stamped out into nothing.

He sits in his truck, watching her house like he has every day for the past week. Deep down he knows he should watch her for longer, but it's nearly impossible for him to go on. He needs her dead, and with his 40th birthday and Christmas creeping up on him, he needs it all over *now*. Winston is gone, everything is set up for Chiyoh, and now it's just Hannibal and himself. Not that Hannibal is much company. The closer they get to this all being over, the more subdued he becomes, like he's resigning himself.

That's fine. He needs to focus his attention at the task at hand.

What a fool she is, anyway. He's stepped into his becoming, she should know that she's never safe.

Beside him, Hannibal sits, waiting patiently. His space feels bigger, wider. The tingling shoots up his arm despite the fact they aren't touching at all into his fingers that cling to the chain and to little, silver Jesus. His phone sits in his hand. There's no going back from this, he's already this far. He violently punches in a number.

It rings twice before the woman on the other end answers, albeit confused. It's so late. No one calling could be up to anything good. "Hello?"

Will looks to Hannibal who has been, despite his usual resignation, so encouraging about all of this that he feels sick. "Freddie."

She hesitates. "Will Graham. I didn't expect to hear from you."

"Listen," he has to control the attitude that wants to seep in. This isn't the time for that, he just needs to let bygones be bygones. "I have a story for you."

"About this copycat?" She asks, almost annoyed. "The American Hero, saving us all from Hannibal Lecter and Francis Dolarhyde. Are you going to save us from the Doctor's copy?"

"This is about Francis Dolarhyde," he swallows. "And maybe the copycat."

The other end is silent for a long time. “The FBI–“

“Do you want it or not? I could give this story to anyone,” he snaps and then corrects. Breathing so heavily from his nose that she must hear him collection himself. “The FBI gave you a story. Something fabricated. You’re smart, you know that. I was there.”

Hannibal looks at the house. One of the lights flicks on. “We haven’t much time, Will.”

“And you’re just going to give it to me?” Freddie tries to seem disinterested but she could never be. The FBI lying isn’t news to anyone, but Will Graham being the whistleblower is. “When would you like to meet?”

“Give me a week,” he says. “You can choose where we meet. Believe me, it hurts to admit it but there’s no one better to break a story like this.”

Besides, she already called them out before. Murder Husbands. A ridiculous little name he tried so hard to forget. It stuck to his ribs when he first read it and despite how best efforts, bits of it remain like bad hymns.

“There’s a café, I’ll send you the address.” Will can hear her moving on the other end of the line. “This better be good.”

Will hangs up without another word. He had a legacy he could leave, but with everything nearly in place now, he doesn’t want it. The lie he lives now is a horrible little thing, something that should’ve never come to pass. For all the reasons he might be damned with Hannibal, he refuses for it to be because he’s living a lie fabricated by the very people who set him up. The world needs to know, even if he doesn’t get to see the ramifications of it.

He and Hannibal share a look. It’s a finalizing one. It’s time.

“This could ruin a lot of people’s careers,” Will sighs. Jack’s, Alana’s, hopefully Prurnell’s. “They don’t *all* deserve it.”

If Hannibal had it his way, Will would kill Alana and Jack too. He won’t, he has complicated feelings about the both of them but none of them end in murder. Perhaps if it weren’t so close to the end, but it is and there isn’t time to consider any of that.

He also wants him to kill Molly. He’s whispered that in his ear every day since Winston left with Chiyoh, but Will tries to drown that out. It’s getting harder though and he has to remind himself that Molly is the most innocent victim of them all.

“It’s the truth,” Hannibal says. “Sometimes we must deal in the truth. Bedelia shall meet hers tonight.”

Will swallows, tries to steady himself, and then unbuckles. “It’ll be more than that.”

Finally Hannibal touches him, the buzzing of what should be his hand has begun to calm him more than is good. It’s so intense now too, an anxious comfort. He wants to curl more into it. To hold him. To have him. To love him.

“As long as the copycat comes within the week, this will all go as planned.” Hannibal’s unblinking eyes watch him. “He’s becoming quite confident.”

Will nods. “I know.”

“Are you ready?” He asks.

Will laughs, “Have you ever cared if I was ready before?”

Hannibal stares at him, if anyone else could see him they’d be unnerved but all Will can feel is his hatred and his relief. “I never pushed you more than you could handle.”

Without acknowledging that lie, Will gets out of the car. Her house is large, really larger than she needs and he has to walks up a nicely kept yard to get to the door (he walks on the grass specifically to spite her). He doesn’t hesitate, he doesn’t dare dream of it. He knocks and waits.

It takes Bedelia far too long to open it. He gets antsy, twitchy, digging his nails into his falls and thumbing over Jesus of Nazareth on his chest. When she does eventually answer, she isn’t immediately shocked. If anything, it takes her a handful of seconds to even recognize who’s at her door, but the moment the light of it starts to creep into her hooded eyes, Will shoves his palm hard against her mouth. Blood bursts through his fingers and over his hand, it ripples over the edges and stains her skin. If she would scream she would, but she doesn’t fight him. Maybe too dazed, maybe too high, but he throws her back into her house without much fuss. Blood pours down her face, platting against the hardwood in quick drips. She says something but Will doesn’t catch it, it’s too gargled and Hannibal’s in his ear, whispering, demanding. Blood rushes into his ears fast and then it tampers out. He slams her head against a wall, blood gushes from her mouth and the back of her head and she hits the floor.

“Hurry,” Hannibal whispers to him. The cold tingling engulfs him down to the marrow and for once in his life, he truly feels possessed. “We must be quick about this.”

Bedelia is not at all heavy. He hauls her up over his shoulder, blood pooling behind him as he walks. What’ll take the longest is preparing their meal, but she’s already drugged herself (an addiction he thought maybe she had beat but he guesses not) and now she’s out cold. No one’s coming, they have all the time in the world, but he doesn’t want to be here longer than he has to.

In the truck he thought he might savor this, but now he knows he can’t. She had Hannibal once, and if it weren’t for his own designs, he’d have slit her throat already. He still has a good mind to do it, but he’ll hold off for now.

He carries her to her bedroom. He doesn’t care about being gentle with her, the meat will good regardless of how he is with the body. This is personal anyway, the most personal of his kills since his father, and he doesn’t care if whoever finds her knows it. They should–they *need* to.

Everyone was right. They always had been.

Freddie Lounds will break the news first, he guesses. Her body wouldn't be found if it wasn't for what he plans to tell her. She goes days at a time without leaving and she's retired so there's no patients waiting for her. It's almost tragic how easily all of Hannibal's past lovers face to same consequences as if they could've known Will would feel so… protective of what is his.

The sin of having been with Hannibal Lecter is a great one, one that Will can never forgive – especially for her.

He drops her onto the bed, her body crumples up, and he leaves her like that to get the rest of what he needs. In the back of his truck, he has a few items Hannibal picked out from the work shed and kitchen. Nothing as good as what Hannibal used to have, but it'll do. The hand saw is currently the most important. It may wake her up, but he'll hold her down. It won't be too much trouble.

She's bleeding all over the bed when he comes back. It isn't enough blood to really raise concerns but it is messier than Hannibal likes.

"She'll bleed out," Hannibal warns as Will touches the saw to her soft thigh. "The thigh is delicate."

"I'll wake her up before that happens," Will scoffs. "And you'll tell me what to do."

Hannibal wants her leg to have as clean a cut as possible, but Will isn't working with anything fancy. He thought about his electric saw but that would be too difficult. It would fling bits of meat everywhere and that's probably messier than even he wants to deal with. He flips up her dress a bit higher and makes the first thick cut.

Each move is talked through. Hannibal knows exactly where and how to cut to ensure she bleeds the least and when it comes down to arteries, he explains to Will exactly how to clamp them. It won't hold, of course, but it isn't meant to.

In the back of his mind he laments. He wishes it was always like this, that Hannibal tried. This is the most he's talked in days and he's being understanding. Why couldn't he be this way from the beginning? The very beginning. The day they met in Jack's office.

Once her leg is removed, he wraps up the end of her thigh to try and stop some of the bleeding. It isn't his best work but Bedelia doesn't deserve that sort of dedication. He leaves her there and takes her leg down to her very clean, very unused kitchen. Cooking is the hardest part. She doesn't have all the ingredients and Will may know how to cook, but Hannibal's so particular. He wants things done a certain way, ways that simply aren't possible. They make do with what's available.

Tenderizing, seasoning, and then baking. He saws through the middle of her shin so it'll fit in her over. The hardy aroma of her fills the house in simple minutes. He's hungry; his tongue tastes like ashes.

Her leg is medium rare when he pulls it out. Hannibal eyeballs it, and Will trusts his opinion when it comes to cooking an entire leg. The outside is crispy, he runs a knife over us and it

crunches. God knows how that happened, Hannibal's always been so gifted in the kitchen. It makes his mouth water.

He sets the table, three plates despite the fact it'll only be two dining, then he goes back and gets Bedelia.

She has lost a lot of blood, more than either of them really expected. So, she'll die soon. Die and probably face no consequences at all. Whatever is waiting on her after all of this is going to forgive her for her sins because of how terrible a death he's giving her. He can't harp on that though. There isn't time.

He sits her at the end of the table, he body slumps but she doesn't fall face first into her plate. He wonders just how many pills she took today. How many pills is enough to rid yourself of Hannibal Lecter?

Hannibal's on him again. "Get the wine."

"What is this?" Will goes into the kitchen to pick through the bottles she has readily available. "The last supper?"

When he comes back she's bleary but awake. It takes her a whole minute to even realize he's walking about her, blinking so slowly it seems like she's fighting sleep. To allow herself to go back under now would be a grave mistake. Then, he truly will do everything in his power to keep her alive until he feels pleased with her suffering.

"I never assumed you'd have it in you," She whispers. "That was… my mistake."

Will nods, coming around to pour her a heaping glass. It nearly runs over. "I know."

"You've become him, you know." Her eyes are so heavy. There's a spark of fear there, but the drugs and blood loss don't let it catch. It must be distant, awful. She's internally clawing for it, for anything, but there's nothing. He wonders if there is any religion in her, if she is praying to some god to save her.

He doubts it. She has too much misplaced dignity.

"No," Will shakes his head. "I'm not. I've become myself."

That is true. It has been, even after the fall when he tried to pretend it wasn't. Even when he laid with Molly and played the emotionally unavailable husband and father. Hiding the beast, the creature, within himself. It is here though, always has been, hidden under layers of a suit he has been perfectly crafting since his childhood.

This creature in him, though, is dying. It's choked and suffering and already rotting inside of him. Putrid. It can't live without Hannibal now. This screech owl. Maybe it could've before, but now his creature and Hannibal's share a blood supply.

Bedelia's half lidded eyes glance over the display. It isn't as pretty as Hannibal's, no doubt, but it's good. It's right. It's the show of something that suffers. Will is bleeding out on the table.

“He told me how to do that.” He decides it’s time to serve. “Each step.”

Bedelia blinks, eyes flickering around. “Religion has that effect on people. We start hearing and seeing signs from the dead. Even when they’re not there.” She stares up at Will, lips parted. The blood on her teeth is flaking. “Do you see your Messiah? Do you pray to him and hear his voice?”

Will looks at Hannibal. The look between them is hot, angry. It’s hate and lust and horrible, disgusting sadness.

“This isn’t that, Bedelia. It never will be.” He walks around with a cut of meat. Dripping oily red across the floor.

He comes around the table, the rough cut of meat splats down onto her plate. Her hand moves in his peripheral, slow and near calculated. He snatches her wrist, holds it so high up her arm makes a strange popping sound. The fork drops, clattering across the smooth flood. He doesn’t stop squeezing, not until she sucks in a little breath and his palms and fingers start to burn from the force.

“Will,” Hannibal comes close. “Control yourself.”

He drops his wrist down. It hasn’t broken, but the bruise that’ll form there won’t be any small thing.

She holds her limp hand close to her chest. A few tears run down her cheeks but Bedelia does her best to collect herself. She wants to die with dignity but there’s no dignity in this. In what they are. “The FBI will know you did this.”

“No one will notice you’re missing. Not for some time. You should’ve made friends, Bedelia.” He clicks his tongue. “Coming back into the light but keeping your distance. There’s no safety here.”

“When someone does find me–“

“I won’t be a problem for them anymore.” He puts a tender cut of his thigh on her plate. “You were right. That tastes like vinegar to admit, but I can’t live without him. I wasn’t sure about *with* him but I think I could’ve made it work.”

“He won’t be waiting,” she slurs, “Where he is, no one can wait. You know that.” It’s her final attempt to save herself. “Do you want that? I read your file I know–“

“He’s here, now.” He nods in Hannibal’s direction. “I have faith, Bedelia. Not in God. Right beside me,” he leans close to her, voice pitched low, “whispering in my ear. I think he’s sinking into me.”

His absolute hatred for her makes him feel bold. His sadness falls to the wayside. He hates to say he *is* scared to burn, a little piece of him always will be, but to burn for Hannibal just has to be worth it. It has to.

“You’ll scare her,” Hannibal all but teases. He can’t believe he’s capable of that at all. He can’t recall one moment since he first acknowledged his presence that he has teased him. It pisses him off.

Will waves him off. “She’ll taste better.”

Bedelia blinks slowly. Pale from blood loss. Pale from it all. “Grief has turned you into your own tragic hero. Hallucinations weren’t uncommon for you in the past. Religious delusion.”

“I know this isn’t a hallucination.” Will sits at the table. He cuts himself a thick piece of her. “You should eat.”

“Is that what he’s telling you?” She asks. “Is Hannibal whispering in your ear that he’s real and waiting?”

Will’s jaw sets. He hates that she knows, but it’s true. It’s real. He’s never been more certain of anything and he won’t let her sway him. He slams his hand down hard, their glasses tremble. “Fucking eat.”

She hesitates and then brings the fork to her lips. She’s eaten the meat of others, she’s devoured it. He follows suit, cutting into his piece and placing it on the tongue. It doesn’t melt, but he never expected it too.

He chews slowly, savoring the bitterness of her. If he had more time, if he really wanted her to suffer, (if Hannibal was alive) he thinks he could’ve cooked her better. It’s fine he guesses.

He swallows, despite its bitterness, the meal goes down smoothly. He stands, preens, and picks up the knife he’s using to eat his meal. She can’t fight it. He walks around, places a hand on her cooling forehead, and digs the knife into her skin. It bunches at the tip and he snatches, blood splatters. Not as much as he hoped. She’s just lost too much blood.

“I wanted to kill her when I found her in Italy.” Will drops her head. She slumps over, head smacking so hard her plate cracks.

“You could have,” Hannibal says like that’s the truth. It isn’t. It’s so far from it he almost barks out a laugh.

“No,” he sighs and returns to his place at the table. “I couldn’t have.”

For once Hannibal doesn’t fight him and he sinks down and cuts himself another piece. He eats until his stomach hurts and he thinks he might burn in Hell for gluttony rather than murder.

The rest he’ll pack up and take home to get him through the week. That and some squishy, raw parts of her. He’ll have more time at home to cook as he pleases. To make a better meal. Something they both can be proud of.

His fingers go to touch his necklace, ready to feel Jesus’s little face with his thumb and rub the chain. All he feels is skin. His shirt and hot skin. His eyebrows knit together , fingers running over his throat. He could’ve swore he just had it.

Chapter End Notes

i plan to finish this fic by the first week of august (◍•ᴗ•◍)

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